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THE NINETEENTH
HOLE MYSTERY
A CRIME CLUB *Novel*

A Crime Club Detective Story

It was at the "nineteenth hole" at Allingham, a quiet but tricky links in Dorset, that Roger Bennion first met the four crack players from London. He could hold his own with them at golf, and at cards, though they did not then realise that criminal investigation was his strong suit. Then came Hugh Denton. This caused a sensation. It was obvious that the four men knew him—and hated him. Anyhow, the next day he was found shot through the head. A second murder in the "nineteenth" further complicates matters, and for a while the police are stymied. But Roger Bennion gets to work, and the grim match is soon moving swiftly to a tense and unexpected conclusion. *The Nineteenth Hole Mystery* is a perfect example of Mr. Herbert Adams' clever work as a detective story writer, and provides really enjoyable entertainment.

By the Same Author

A WORD OF SIX LETTERS	THE OLD JEW MYSTERY
DEATH OFF THE FAIRWAY	A SINGLE HAIR
THE BLUFF	THE DAMNED SPOT
THE KNIFE	MYSTERY AND MINETTE
THE BODY IN THE BUNKER	FATE LAUGHS

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THE NINETEENTH HOLE MYSTERY

by

HERBERT ADAMS



Published for

THE CRIME CLUB

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TO
LT.-COL. E. Y. DANIEL, C.B.E.
(" DAN ")
A GREAT SPORTSMAN

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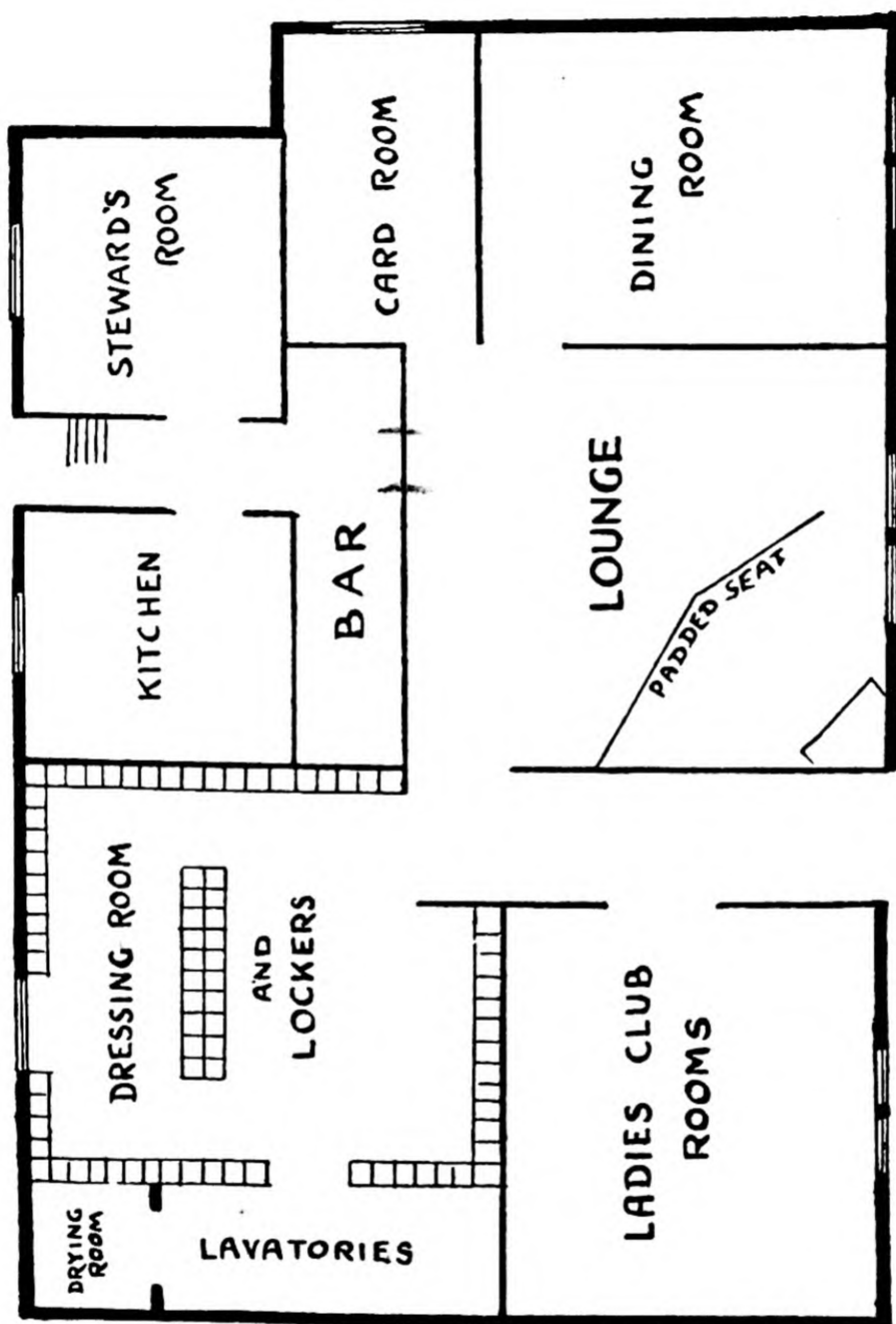
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

ALL the unpleasant characters in this story are entirely imaginary. Certain of the incidents are founded on fact, but the descriptions of the persons concerned are in no sense portraits of those who actually took part in them.





THE "19TH" AT ALLINGHAM.

CHAPTER ONE

GOOD COMPANIONS

WERE they supermen—or astonishing liars?

"I went round in sixty-five," announced the fair one. "Out in thirty-six, home in twenty-nine."

"Then I beat you," said the Monocle. "Thirty-four out, twenty-seven home. Total sixty-one. Took my eye off or I'd have done better."

"Not good enough," commented a third. "I broke sixty—thirty-eight and twenty-one."

"Morning, everybody."

The fourth entered the room, a thin dark fellow with a closely clipped moustache. He seemed in good spirits and when his friends had acknowledged his greeting his words proved it.

"What a topping day! I feel fit for anything."

"Sounds as though you had done a good score," said the Monocle. "What was it?"

"Seventy," answered the newcomer as the waiter came for his order. "Nothing to boast of, but my game has improved by forty strokes since I got here."

As he spoke his twinkling eyes met those of the only stranger in the room. The stranger smiled back, but he was asking himself that first question: Are they supermen, or astonishing liars?

When one stays at a place in Dorset calling itself the Allingham Golf Hotel; when the links surround it, stretching almost to the sea; and when all the visitors appear devoted to the same alluring game,

such a conversation could apparently have only one meaning. But when the course is notoriously difficult, with a standard scratch score of seventy-two, talk of breaking sixty is ludicrous. Yet these men seemed to accept one another's statements in all seriousness. Roger Bennion waited to hear more. The fair man now was glancing at him rather slyly, as though wondering what he made of it. Perhaps it was a leg-pull designed for his benefit.

Arriving late the previous night, Roger had seen the four of them in the smoking-room. The hotel was very empty, it being an "off" season, and he had judged they were a party of friends rather congratulating one another that they had the place so much to themselves. Having driven from London he was tired, and had left them starting a new rubber of bridge. Now they were together again at breakfast, yet they spoke of their wonderful rounds as if they had just been played.

"There ought to be a handicap," said the Monocle. "The course is longer for Provost and me."

"But Korwood and I get caught in the rough," retorted the fair one. "You don't."

At this there was a laugh and they all busied themselves with their food. To Roger the emptiness of the place was disappointing. He had promised himself a week's golf and at the last moment the man who was to have come with him had cried off, owing to an unexpected business call. One can generally get games on the spot, but at the moment there seemed little prospect of it. Except for this quartette, a self-contained party for golf and bridge, there were no players in sight. There might of course be plenty at the club-house, and no doubt the professional would be available.

Then once again he caught the eye of the late-

comer, the dark fellow who had been called Korwood. There was something friendly in his smile.

"Is there a miniature course?" Roger asked him.

"I don't think so," was the reply.

"I was told the record was sixty-eight, made three years ago by one of the Whitcombes. You and your friends seem to have done some remarkable performances."

He was of course conscious that they were all looking at him, and a shout of laughter greeted his remark. Well, if it was a leg-pull, there are worse ways of breaking the ice.

"But there is a miniature course," declared the Monocle. "Four miniature courses to be exact."

At this they all laughed again.

"It is my first visit," said Roger, wondering just where the joke came in.

"And you brought your course with you," murmured the fair man to a further accompaniment of chuckles.

"Played it well too," said Monocle.

"Very well," agreed Provost. "Smooth finish ought to count as well as the number of strokes."

"That would require a lady umpire," said Monocle, and this caused more amusement.

"They are not talking of golf, but of shaving," explained Korwood, with his kindly twinkle.

"Oxley started it." He indicated the man with the monocle. "He said most fellows went round the face twice, but did not know how many strokes they took. So we began to count. I took a hundred on the first half and about sixty afterwards."

"Then he studied the follow through," said Provost, "and did forty better."

"I hold the record," added the fair man, whose

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name was Bardwell. "Out in thirty and home in twenty-one."

"Experts with the old cut-throat razor," said Roger, "used to boast that they could give a man a perfect shave in four strokes, but how many I take with my safety I haven't the slightest idea."

"If you follow your normal course," said Oxley, "I will bet you half a crown you will want at least a hundred."

"Before I take you," replied Roger, "I would like to hear more about your lady umpire."

At this they laughed again. They were certainly very friendly. They began to talk of their actual performances on the real links and seemed pleased for Roger to join in the conversation.

"There is something I want to ask you fellows," said Korwood suddenly. "I meant to last night, but forgot. You remember I had to visit my friends the Robinsons in the afternoon and Oxley was going to Bere Abbas, which is in the same direction but twice as far. He was taking the hotel car, so I said I would go with him and pay my share, he picking me up on the way back. They are charging us twenty shillings. How much ought I to pay?"

"Obviously ten shillings," declared Oxley. "When you share a cab you don't quibble about the odd miles."

"But we agreed I was to pay my proportion," protested Korwood. "You might have driven on to Weymouth or Land's End for all it concerned me."

They argued about it with some warmth, though quite good-humouredly. Roger judged it was the squabble rather than the cash that mattered. They enjoyed ragging, and each was anxious to score off the other. Oxley stuck to a charge of ten shillings apiece and Korwood, admitting he was not strong at

mathematics, persisted that his share must be less than half. The others listened with amusement.

"I will toss you who pays it all," said Oxley.

"No," objected Korwood, "that would be admitting it was an even chance."

"It is really very simple," declared Bardwell, the fair man. He, like Korwood, had a moustache, hence the assertion that Provost and Oxley, who were clean-shaven, had longer courses to tackle in their razor competition. "You say Oxley went twice as far as you did, therefore he should pay twice as much. That makes it thirteen and four for him and six and eight for you."

"Judgment accordingly," said Provost, "with leave to appeal."

"I do appeal," cried Korwood. "What do you say?" He turned to Roger with the question.

"If the facts are as stated," answered Roger, "and on a strictly mathematical basis, I should charge you five shillings and him fifteen."

"Absurd," exclaimed Oxley. "He went half-way, didn't he?"

"I don't quite see how you work it," added Bardwell.

"Suppose the distance was twenty miles each way and the charge sixpence a mile—a pound in all. The first ten miles they share, that is half a crown each. The next ten miles one goes alone—five shillings for him. So they go out for seven and six and two and six. It is the same on the way back, making fifteen shillings to five."

"Of course!" cried Korwood. "Perfectly simple. Any child could see it. Here is five bob and the whole thing can go on your bill."

"I'll toss you ten or nothing," said Oxley. He did not dispute the verdict. Roger guessed he had

known the right answer all the time. So undoubtedly had Provost, but he enjoyed the sparring.

"No tossing," said Korwood; "you always win."

He passed the money over and the incident ended. It would not have been worth recording but for the fact that it helped to an intimacy between Roger and the others, and in view of what was to happen within such a short time it threw an interesting light on the characters of the parties concerned.

"How shall we play to-day?"

Provost asked the question, rising slowly from his chair and moving to the window. He was a solidly-built, broad-shouldered man of about fifty. There was a certain deliberateness in all he said and did. He seemed in a quiet way to be the leader of the little party.

"What about starting round one?" suggested Oxley. "I play Bardwell."

"Let us have another four-ball first," said Korwood. "I am only beginning to know the course."

"Make the most of your ignorance," advised Oxley. "The better you know the troubles the more they will scare you."

"Have you ever played at Wandleton Park, London?" Bardwell turned to Roger with the question.

"Two or three times. I belong to Sunningdale."

"We are here on a special competition of our own," said Korwood. "Each plays all the others twice and the winner of the most matches takes the prize."

"Good fun," commented Roger. "The fellow who was to have come with me let me down, but I suppose it will not be difficult to get games?"

"You wouldn't care to join us?" asked Provost, coming back from the window.

"Rather spoil your party, wouldn't it?"

"Not at all. We were to have been five, but one failed us at the last. Four is really rather few for such a contest."

"It is awfully good of you," said Roger. "Of course I should love it, if you really mean it."

"It will cost you a quid," warned Korwood. "A pound a head, so the winner gets a fiver. We determined one of us should win something somehow sometime!"

"And the winner is expected to stand a dinner in town," added Oxley, "which may be covered by a tenner."

"Probably a good investment for me," laughed Roger.

"But don't forget," said Bardwell, "if you win you must spend the prize money on something utterly useless or you will become a professional."

"I know a man who won a lot of chits at a tennis tournament," said Oxley. "He asked if he might put the money towards paying his dentist for a new set of teeth. He was told no; but it might pay for a vase to keep them in, when not in use. Otherwise he lost his amateur status."

"All that does not deter me, if you will let me join you," said Roger. "I suppose you play on handicap?"

"We do," said Provost, "but we award the handicaps ourselves. What are you?"

"I am supposed to play to three."

"That is a bit better than the rest of us and we have agreed to handicap with bisques. Three strokes equalling two bisques."

"Whatever you think fair," said Roger.

"Bisques are fair," declared Korwood. "You always get them. Strokes may be useless."

"That is perfectly true," agreed Oxley. "I once played a fellow for a fiver, he giving me seven strokes. He beat me because not a single stroke came in. I either won or lost the holes without them. With one bisque I should have halved, and with two I would have won."

"How will it work out?" asked Roger.

"That depends on how we class you," said Provost.

"You four had better play this morning," suggested Bardwell, "then you can see what he is like. I'll get a game somehow."

"Meaning," grinned Oxley mischievously, "with the fair Vickie?"

"I might play with her," said Bardwell, a little self-consciously.

The others laughed.

"You are a cunning devil," said Korwood. "It was at your suggestion we came here and then we find you have a special lady friend staying in the place!"

"I suggested you should come here," returned Bardwell warmly, "because it is a jolly good course and you did not know it."

"And Miss Vickie Venne was just a happy coincidence," mocked Oxley.

"Have I ever spoilt a match or been missing when you wanted a foursome?" demanded Bardwell. He was the youngster of the party and his fair skin flushed easily.

"You never have," interposed Provost peacefully. "Your idea is a good one. You get your game elsewhere and we will have a trial trip. I didn't catch your name?"

"Bennion—Roger Bennion."

Often when Roger gave his name it would be greeted with some such question as "Not the Roger Bennion who helped Scotland Yard in the—affair?" Mention being made of one of the cases in which his aid to the police had become known. It was a tribute to his success, but he never welcomed it. He was not unduly modest, but he hated it to appear that he went out of his way looking for crime. Happily on this occasion there was no such suggestion.

"Then, Mr. Bennion," said Provost, "if you will come round with us we will try to fix you with a handicap that will ensure our getting your money."

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CHAPTER TWO

INNOCENT PASTIME

THERE was nothing to suggest the approach of any unpleasantness to mar the little holiday. Roger considered that he was very lucky to have fallen in with such a cheery group of fellows. They accepted him as one of themselves and he took part in their ragging, generally giving as good as he got.

If they seemed in no hurry to start the particular contest they had come to play, it was from no lack of keenness; quite the reverse. Each was so anxious to win that he wished to wait until he felt he was at the top of his form before playing the games that mattered so much. Roger was regarded as scratch. Provost took three bisques, Oxley four and Korwood and Bardwell six each. They had many friendly games on those lines and, although Roger felt the odds were a shade too heavy, he found it very good fun and the probable loss of the stake money did not worry him.

They also asked him to join them at bridge. He did not want to intrude, but they declared it was a relief to cut out sometimes. And there was poker when they all played together. The stakes were modest and no one lost unduly.

Bardwell introduced him to Miss Vickie Venne. She was a striking young woman of perhaps eight and twenty. Slim, with dark eyes, long lashes and strongly marked brows, she possessed a vivid personality. Her firm mouth was perhaps a little hard in repose but she had a very charming smile.

She played an excellent game of golf and there was no doubt that she and Bertram Bardwell meant a great deal to one another.

"Did you know any of these men before?" she asked Roger, when they were introduced.

"No," he said. "It was very decent of them to let me come in. I don't want to spoil their party."

"No fear of that," she smiled. "It lets one of them get away sometimes."

He knew which one she meant and it all seemed to work very happily. They had singles and four-somes and the only cause of dissension arose from the fact that whenever Oxley and Korwood played together, they invariably came in arguing furiously about some point that had arisen on which they could not agree. It seemed that their friendship flourished on strife.

"Well, who won?" Provost asked them on the afternoon of Roger's first day. They had gone out for a single.

"I did," said Korwood quickly.

"I did," said Oxley. "We played for half a crown and I am still waiting for it."

"Rot!" cried Korwood excitedly. "I did the eighteenth in one! We were all square on the tee and I holed my drive. Never done it before in my life. How can any one beat that?"

"If you holed in one," said Provost, "drinks round are on you. You had better order them and then we'll hear the rest of the story."

"That has been changed," declared Korwood. "The rule now is that you all stand me drinks. But I don't mind either way if he admits I am right."

"You are not," said Oxley.

"What really happened?" asked Roger.

"I told you. We were all square at the eighteenth, and I holed my drive. You can't rob a man of that, can you?"

"Better let me tell it." Oxley fixed his monocle and smiled in his most tantalising manner. "Thanks to amazing luck with his putts he did get all square on the last tee and it was his honour. As you know, it is a one-shot hole. He pushed his drive on to the bank beyond the green. I fluffed mine and was caught in the bunker. Out in two. I ran the third to the lip of the hole, having a certain four. We searched for his, but couldn't find it. We thought it had probably gone out of bounds. He went back and drove again. This time he got into the bunker—counting three. Out in four and beside the pin with his fifth——"

"And then we found my first ball in the hole!" interrupted Korwood, rolling his eyes in his excitement. "It must have run down the bank and trickled in."

"Doesn't matter how it got there," said Oxley. "You discovered it too late."

"I holed in one," cried Korwood. "The moment you played two, the game was over. My match."

"I was down in four," grinned Oxley. "You took six. My match!"

"You can't hole in one and lose!" protested Korwood. "What do you fellows say?"

Roger and Provost exchanged smiles. "What do you think, Bennion?" asked the latter.

Roger liked Korwood. He was a little excitable, but was such a genuinely good fellow. Still rules are rules.

"It is the toughest bit of luck I have ever heard of," he said, "but I am afraid if you abandon a ball it counts as lost, wherever it may be."

"B-but the match was over," spluttered Korwood. "He had played three and I was in the tin!"

"You had abandoned it," said Roger. "After you went back and played another you couldn't reclaim it. Isn't that so, Provost?"

"It is. The rulings are quite clear on the point. If you think a shot may be lost you can drive another tentatively before you leave the tee, and carry on with the first if you find it. But if you follow up the first and then go back and play again, it is the second that counts. Still, Korwood has the satisfaction of knowing that he *did* hole out in one."

"And lost the hole and the match," muttered that man so ruefully that they all had to laugh.

"Hand over my half-crown," said Oxley, "and I will stand the drinks."

The following morning the same players, eager to adjust their dispute in another match, came in with a further problem that would have puzzled most experts at the game. Roger had joined their table for meals and it gave them something to talk about all through lunch. And once again the matter at issue left the result of the contest in doubt.

"It was at the long sixth," explained Korwood. "Oxley was a yard past the hole in five. I was just short of the green in three. I took my putter and the ball ran past the hole and hit his. That still left me a shot for a win. He claimed the right to replace his ball and he put it in a dead line between mine and the hole. An absolute stymie."

"Quite right," nodded Oxley. "That is where it was before you moved it."

"But it wasn't," protested Korwood. "I said he could replace it where he liked if he let me putt first."

"The ball must be replaced before either side plays," said Oxley. "That is the rule."

"But the rule doesn't give any one the right to imagine a stymie!"

"No imagination," declared Oxley. "Sheer fact."

"That, I suppose," said Provost, "is the real point at issue—where the ball was before it was hit?"

"Exactly," said Korwood warmly. "From where I played, off the green, no one could possibly swear to the precise blade of grass a ball the other side of the hole was sitting on!"

"I followed the line," grinned Oxley. He was obviously enjoying the wrangle.

"How did you settle it?" asked Bardwell.

"We didn't," said Korwood. "I was entitled to a clear shot for the hole and refused to play if he misplaced his ball."

"I said we were playing golf, not croquet," added Oxley. "So we picked up."

"We played the other holes," added Korwood. "and left off all square. So it was virtually my game."

"What do you think about that, Bennion?" inquired Provost.

"When players disagree as to a detail of fact," said Roger, "it is obvious that no one who was not there can settle it for them. Both, it is assumed, are honest; so you reach a deadlock the rules do not provide for."

"Then what must be done?"

"Play the hole again," suggested Bardwell.

"Hardly fair to the man who had a stroke in hand."

"Then what?"

"As it was," broke in Korwood, "I had a shot for it and at the worst got a half. If I let him lay his beastly stymie I might have gone too far and lost."

"So that quite likely it would have been my hole," said Oxley with his malicious grin, "and therefore my match."

"Points not covered by the rules," said Roger, "have to be submitted to the committee and are decided on lines of general equity."

"So if it happened in a competition," said Bardwell, "you might have to wait a month to know who was entitled to play in the next round!"

"What is equity in such a case?" asked Provost.

"I am not a committee," laughed Roger. "But when Korwood and Oxley meet in your competition they must have a referee. I have never known people with such a genius for getting into knots."

"You mustn't think those two are not really good friends," Provost remarked to him a little later. "They love to score off one another, that is all."

"I realise that," said Roger, "but do you suppose from where they were Oxley could be so positive about that stymie?"

Provost smiled in his quiet way. "Who can tell? It was an ingenious idea and raised a very interesting point."

The following afternoon Roger was invited to play in a mixed foursome. He was to partner a Miss Winifred Gainer—called Winsome Winnie by most of her friends—against Bardwell and Vickie Venne.

Winnie was short, substantial and very chatty. She could hit a good ball and between the shots she kept up a steady stream of conversation designed to impart to the newcomer as much information as was possible in the shortest conceivable time. She also drew his attention to some people who were destined to play important parts in the drama that was so soon to unfold itself.

Before they finished the third hole Roger knew

her father was a retired bank manager, that her mother suffered from asthma, that she had a brother in London, and had twice cruised to Norway. She also told him that Vickie Venne had only lived there for a year, having come to be with her father on the death of her mother.

"Do you see that old gentleman over there, walking along so slowly?"

"I seem to see two of him," said Roger, "and I only had a small lager for lunch."

"They are brothers," giggled Winnie. "I meant the one nearest to us. He is Major Gwyer, the captain of the club. It is so sad about him. They are bachelors and live together."

"Is that so melancholy?"

"I dare say it is," she giggled again; "but I did not mean that. He's tremendously nice, but a bad illness left him with such a weak heart that they say he might die at any time."

"That is bad luck," agreed Roger. "Of course he cannot play?"

"No, and he used to be fearfully good. We had a man a year ago who played a wonderful round and at the last hole he drove on to the green and then dropped dead. He was cremated and his ashes spread on the first fairway."

"Rather a fine end for a golfer. Major Gwyer is still your captain?"

"Oh, yes. He has been for three years. He wanted to resign, but they wouldn't let him. I expect he'll be captain as long as he lives."

"He must be very popular."

"He is a darling," said Winnie.

"But how did he manage to remain a bachelor with so many charming girls about?"

"They say he was disappointed when he was

young. I don't know the story properly, but the girl is supposed to have turned him down on the very eve of the wedding. Silly fool. I hope she got someone who beat her. He has never looked at any one else."

"The brother didn't marry either?"

"Oh, he was a born bachelor," declared Winnie.

"We mostly are," said Roger.

"I suppose you are," she giggled; "but some grow out of it."

"They are two up," he remarked. "If we are to win, we must concentrate a bit."

"Do you think Vickie and Mr. Bardwell are concentrating?" she retorted. "On the game, I mean? Do you think I talk too much?"

"Not a bit," he vowed; "but it is all so interesting that I am letting you down."

For a time they devoted themselves more steadily to the play and they won the two holes back.

"That big man over there is a great friend of mine," Winnie began again.

"Talking to the left-handed fellow?"

"Yes. He is Mr. Ferrowe. At our last fancy-dress ball he came as Chu Chin Chow. He looked just wonderful and took the first prize."

"What were you?" asked Roger.

"A Dutch girl in clogs. But I took them off for dancing. A girl as Salome won the ladies' prize. She—well, there was more fancy than dress."

After another quiet interlude, she went on:

"Why did you say the man Mr. Ferrowe was talking to was left-handed? Do you know him?"

"No," said Roger.

"You have seen him playing?"

"No. It was just how he was walking. Perhaps he isn't left-handed."

"But he is," said Winnie. "His name is Mr. Norton. He and Mr. Ferrowe generally play with Mr. Miller and Mr. Benting. How could you tell he was left-handed by the way he walked?"

"It wasn't exactly that," laughed Roger. "His bag was slung over his right shoulder. Nine times out of ten a right-handed man carries his clubs on his left shoulder, and a left-handed man on his right shoulder. Of course there are exceptions and people occasionally change, but it is generally that way."

"I never noticed it," she said. "You must be frightfully observant."

"I hope Winnie has been telling you everything about everybody," Vickie Venne said to him a little later.

"Perhaps not everything," he owned, "but we have made a good start."

It had been an even game and appropriately ended all square.

"We must fight it out again," said Vickie with her delightful smile.

"I would love to," said Roger, "if my partner is willing."

"Oh, rather. Any time," declared Winnie.

They little realised all that was to happen before they played together again. They had tea, then the girls went home and Roger and Bardwell joined the rest of their party in the card-room.

Several hands were played and Korwood cut out. He said he had finished and would get ready for dinner. The cards were falling in their rhythmic piles on the table when he returned.

"Hugh Denton is here," he said abruptly.

Never before had Roger known so simple a statement to cause so startling a sensation.

CHAPTER THREE

ENTER HUGH DENTON

THE card-room in which they were playing was not in the hotel, but in the adjacent club-house. When Provost and his friends finished their afternoon round they generally had tea there and played a rubber or two of bridge.

The club-house was a low building with a central lounge available for both women and men. At one end of it was the bar, and the dining-room and card-room opened from it. The dressing-room with the lockers, and the ladies' quarters were the other side of the entrance passage. The local members mostly played their rounds in the mornings, so, except at the week-ends when the business community was at liberty, the place was almost empty at tea-time and the bridge players were undisturbed.

That afternoon Roger was partnering Provost against Oxley and Bardwell when Korwood entered with his dramatic announcement:

"Hugh Denton is here."

Provost, usually imperturbable, was dealing. He stopped and looked up. He said nothing, but he made a misdeal—the first probably for years.

"What the devil has brought him?" muttered Bardwell.

"Sure it is Denton?" asked Oxley.

"Not a doubt of it," replied Korwood. "He didn't see me, but he is out there now, with his nephew."

"Sorry for the nephew," said Bardwell.

"Who is Denton?" asked Roger.

No one answered him and Provost, finding he was a card short, swept up the pack to start again.

"He cannot have known we were here," he said ;
"but it is an amazing coincidence."

"It will spoil our fun if he stays," grumbled Korwood.

"Why should it ? " asked Oxley. "I suppose he has as much right here as we have. He may only be passing through."

"They had their clubs," said Korwood. "I feel sure he means to stop. If he does, we could go on somewhere else."

"And let him drive us away ? " said Bardwell.
"We mustn't do that. We'll just ignore him."

"To see him about the place will give us a bad taste in the mouth," Korwood asserted.

Provost said nothing more. He dealt again, correctly this time, and, as they gathered their cards, Roger repeated his question directly to Korwood.

"Who is he ? "

"He is a member of our club, an absolute outsider. It is easy to ignore him there, but in a little place like this we shall be always coming across him. Talk of coincidences—for four men from London to visit a place in Dorset they have never heard of before and for the fellow they most dislike to turn up there too—it's uncanny."

"What is wrong with him ? " asked Roger.

"Everything," said Bardwell. "You have probably heard of the man who went to the club secretary and complained that he had been insulted—two members had offered him five pounds if he would resign. 'Don't take it,' advised the secretary. 'If you hold out they will probably make it ten.' That might have been Denton."

"If a subscription list was put up," added Korwood, "nearly every one would give something."

"Two clubs," called Provost.

So the play began again. The rubber was a short one and when it was over Roger persuaded Korwood, who had remained watching, to take his place. He always felt a little bit of an intruder and hated the thought that he might be spoiling things for any one of them.

When they started, he strolled out to wash his hands. In the lounge a man and a girl were talking. The girl was Vickie Venne, but why she had returned he could not tell. She was looking angry. The man was speaking in a soft, half-jesting tone.

"An unexpected pleasure for me," he was saying. "You might at least pretend you are a little bit pleased."

"I am not good at pretending," she replied.

He was a big fellow, rather florid, with bold blue eyes and a tawny moustache. Probably in the early forties, he was beginning to put on weight and looked as though he lived well. Roger did not hear any more and apparently neither of them saw him.

Across the passage, at the entrance to the locker-room, he almost ran into the man Winnie Gainer had pointed out as the captain of the club, Major Gwyer.

There are some men whose breeding is obvious at a glance. Gwyer was one of them. Perhaps he looked older than his years, but his very white hair, his finely-cut features, and the way he carried himself would have commanded respect anywhere. Roger muttered a word of apology and stepped aside.

"My fault," smiled Gwyer. "You have joined for a few days, haven't you?"

"For a week," said Roger; "possibly longer."

"You like the course?"

"Very much. It is difficult without being heart-breaking."

"No trouble in getting games, I hope?"

"Not at all. I have been very lucky."

"Good. Our secretary is away just now, but should there be any difficulty the steward will probably be able to fix you up. If not, you must let me know."

"Thank you, sir," said Roger. "It is most kind of you."

It was. The casual visitor at golf courses is often left to manage as best he can for himself. Sometimes the secretary is obliging, but for the captain of the club to show an interest in strangers is decidedly unusual.

When Roger returned, the lounge was empty. The steward was in the bar, so he purchased a packet of cigarettes. The steward, Fred Rolls by name, was rather a character. He was as nearly spherical as any man well could be. He had no neck, his head being set on a tub-like body, which was balanced with surprising accuracy on very short legs. It was a popular joke in the club that when a bell-buoy in the bay had been washed away he had offered to take its place with a light on his head. That he should be called Roly-Poly by the young and disrespectful was inevitable. But he was remarkably active and there was never any question as to his efficiency.

"A good fellow, your captain," remarked Roger, paying for his cigarettes.

"He is that, sir. One of God's best." Rolls spoke in a hoarse, wheezy voice as fat men sometimes do. It was as though his vocal chords had insufficient room to do their work properly.

"Someone told me he was not in very good health; I hope that is not right?"

"Afraid it is, sir," said Rolls, shaking his head. "It would be a bad day for many of us if anything happened to him."

"But I suppose you have a snug enough job?"

"I owe it to him, sir. And you wouldn't believe the many he helps in the winter when times are bad. But he wouldn't like me to talk about it."

"He got you the job, you say?" Roger had chattered with the steward before and had made a friend of him. "What used you to do?"

"Army, sir. I was with Major Gwyer in Mesopotamia in 1918, the Dorset Rifles, and if ever an officer was loved by his men he was. Didn't see him again for fifteen years but he knew me at once, although I had altered a bit. I carried less weight in the old days."

"I believe you," smiled Roger. "Nature is too generous to some of us and we cannot help it."

"You're right there, sir. I was near down and out when the Major met me. He jumped out of a taxi and I offered to carry his bag. 'Why, Rolls,' he said, 'you oughtn't to be doing this.' 'Got to live, sir,' I said. He gave me his address and told me to call."

"Down here?"

"No, sir, that was in London. But he told me they wanted a steward here and I'd best apply. 'But you must look smart,' he said, and he gave me ten pounds to get a good rig out."

"So you got the job?"

"Yes, sir. But even then it weren't so easy. I had to go before the committee and one man said—I heard him before I left the room, 'He's not nippy enough. We don't want a fellow who can't see his feet.' But the Major said, 'You give him a chance. I'll answer for it.' So that settled it."

"And I'll bet they have never been sorry," added Roger.

"No, sir, I don't think they have."

"By the way, Rolls, was that Miss Venne I saw in here just now?"

"She was here, sir."

"Who was she talking to? A member?"

"No, sir. A visitor. He's just gone out with a young gentleman to play a few holes. Likely to be here for a day or two he told me."

As he spoke he pointed to the register in which visitors enter their names and the club they come from when they pay their green fees. Roger glanced at it. "Hugh Denton, Wandleton Park," and on the line below, "Norman Cross, Norbington."

"His nephew?" asked Roger.

"Don't know, sir. Might be."

That the man who had been talking to Vickie Venne was the fellow whose arrival was so unwelcome to his friends had been Roger's idea at the first. This proved it. He wondered if Bardwell was aware of their acquaintance. He decided to say nothing about what he had seen. It was no affair of his, and no doubt Miss Vickie would tell all that was necessary.

"Is Mr. Denton often here?" he asked.

"His first visit, sir."

"Same with me and my friends," commented Roger.

Play was still in progress when he re-entered the card-room. It was not until they were at dinner in the hotel that there was any further reference to, or evidence of, the unwelcome newcomer.

They were all at their usual table when Hugh Denton walked in. He was followed by a fair young fellow of about twenty-one. Not bad looking, the

boy, but his chin was weak and his long hair seemed to have been marcelle waved. They took possession of a seat near the window and the youngster was apparently the first to recognise their fellow-guests. He nudged his companion. Denton stared across the room and then swaggered over with something of an air of bravado.

"Well, well, well," he said, "fancy meeting so many friends in an out-of-the-way spot like this. The world really is very small."

"The pleasure is yours," said Korwood.

"No pleasure, I assure you," returned Denton.

"One has to put up with these things."

He gave a derisive chuckle and went back to his own table.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUGH DENTON EXIT !

"WHAT have you fellows got against this chap Denton ? "

Roger put the question to Korwood with whom he had become rather more intimate than with the others.

" I am not particularly drawn to him myself," he added, " but I am wondering why he is such an absolute blister."

" Take it from me," said Korwood, " he is an out-and-out bounder. Have nothing to do with him, and you will never regret it."

" What about the nephew ? He does not belong to your club ? "

" No. That might cramp his uncle's style. But I suppose Denton had to bring someone to play with."

He seemed disinclined to say more and Roger did not press him. There was room for them all.

It was on a Tuesday that Denton had arrived and on the Wednesday and Thursday the five combatants devoted themselves strenuously to their private and particular contest. Each had four games to play, so they were able to get through the first round. Roger was beaten by Provost but won his other matches, counting three points. Provost also scored three, being unaccountably beaten by Bardwell—the latter's sole win. Oxley won from Korwood and Bardwell, and the last two had one point each. Thanks to the bisques, the games were very close and oddly enough when Oxley played Korwood there was no dispute.

At the third hole their balls had been side by side in the bunker, actually touching one another, but they had agreed as to the correct procedure.

"There is one rule I believe we forgot to tell you," said Bardwell to Roger.

"What is that?"

"We revise the handicaps for the second round according to the results of the first."

"Quite right," said Korwood.

"How is it done?" asked Roger.

"On the number of points. You scored three and I scored one. So in the next round you give me two more bisques. The same for Korwood. You give Oxley one more, and play Provost as before as his score equals yours."

"I see the idea," said Roger; "but you beat Provost and yet he has to give you two more bisques."

"I don't mind that," commented Provost. "He'll never have such luck again."

"Luck!" echoed Bardwell. "It was the only time when I showed my true form!"

"It is all right for me," laughed Roger, "if you are agreed."

They saw Hugh Denton with his nephew at meal times and occasionally on the links. Oxley spoke to him once or twice, but the others completely ignored him. So far as Roger could see, Vickie Venne had nothing to do with him. She inquired from time to time how the great tournament was progressing and Bardwell generally disappeared in the evening, it being understood he was visiting her.

"Her father likes a game of chess," he declared. "There are four of you or I wouldn't go."

Naturally his companions chaffed him, but he took it in very good part. Then on the Thursday

evening he returned unusually early, a detail of which the significance was known later.

"She turned you out quickly to-night," grinned Oxley; "or will you ask us to believe you mated the old boy in four moves?"

"I was tired," said Bardwell shortly. "Going to bed. Good-night."

"Perhaps the course of true love does not run smooth," said Korwood, as the door closed.

"Much better not," Oxley declared. "Every girl who knows her business keeps the man guessing."

Then came the Friday that none of them was ever likely to forget. It began well enough. They had decided to give a truce to golf and do a bit of sailing. They were to take lunch with them and either to have it on the boat, or on a small uninhabited island about two miles from the shore.

It was Oxley who told Roger of the trick they meant to play, and it certainly went off with great success.

Korwood, it appeared, was a bit of a naturalist. He was keen on wild birds and had a good collection of eggs. Although it was autumn it was decided to add to his collection!

Provost, among his other talents, was an artist in water colours. He had brought his paint box with him in case he got a chance of indulging his hobby. Having secured a hard-boiled egg from the breakfast table he proceeded to paint it with splashes and speckles of blue and green and brown that gave a most realistic effect.

The idea, like most of their practical jokes, originated from Oxley. He had had the egg for some days, meaning that Korwood should find it. But it was difficult to plant it in an entirely convincing place, and had it been left out at night its distinctive

colouring might have been washed away by rain. The suggested picnic on the island seemed a heaven-sent opportunity.

It was a glorious day and they set out with a couple of lines, meaning to whiff for mackerel if the conditions were favourable.

"Would you like the fish, if we catch any?" Provost asked the manager of the hotel.

"Certainly, sir. Glad to have them."

"Surely that was an unnecessary question," remarked Korwood.

"Not at all," said Provost. "I once nearly caused a strike by making a present of fish. I brought in a good two dozen and was very pleased with myself when I handed them over at the hotel. "Who's going to clean all these?" demanded the cross and probably overworked cook. She generally got them from the fishmonger ready cleaned, so my present did not please her one little bit. After that I left them for the fishermen."

The morning sport was quite good, a number of mackerel and pollack being hauled in. It was pleasant to scud across the bay in the sunshine. Bardwell was perhaps a little silent, but all the others were in high spirits. There was only one reference to the man they all disliked.

"Any one seen Denton to-day?" asked Korwood.

"Or his nephew?"

No one had.

"Perhaps they have gone," said Roger. "Your geniality may have frozen them out."

"Your mistake," said Korwood. "He would stay just because he knows we hate the sight of him."

"But why do you?" asked Roger.

"There was a little trouble at the club in which he was concerned," said Provost quietly.

Again no one seemed inclined to say more, so the matter dropped. Roger had no wish to pursue a theme evidently distasteful to his friends. Then Oxley suggested lunch.

They found a convenient landing place and were soon enjoying the good fare that had been packed for them. It was delightfully sunny and the only disturbing sounds came from the gulls that circled overhead and swooped daringly near when food was cast in their direction.

"You ought to explore this island, Korwood," said Oxley, as though by sudden inspiration. "Birds' eggs, you know."

"No, old boy, not at this time of year."

"It's not the hatching season, but you sometimes find deserted nests, don't you?"

"Of course you do," said Bardwell, playing up. "A bird is shot, or something else happens, and the eggs are left."

"I want to have a look round, anyway," admitted Korwood.

After that it was easy. For such eggs to have escaped the August picnic parties was extremely doubtful, but no one suggested so unwelcome a thought. Oxley, Provost and Bardwell strolled off in one direction and Roger and Korwood in another. Roger's part was first to lead his companion away, and then to bring him to the route taken by their friends. And there, in a desolate spot on a ledge of rock, Korwood found it!

The nest was genuine enough and in it lay one strangely speckled egg!

"By jove!" exclaimed Korwood. "See what I've found!"

"What is it?" asked Roger.

"I don't know," came the reply in a hushed tone.

"It must be something rare. I will look it up in the bird book."

With almost reverent hands he bore his prize to the boat where the rest of the party were waiting. They congratulated him on his find and hazarded many guesses as to its origin.

"The greater hornbeam," suggested Provost.

"Is it?" said Korwood. "I thought the hornbeam was a tree."

"One sort of hornbeam," admitted his friend.

"Can it be an eagle?" asked Bardwell.

"The morning bittern," guessed Oxley, playing dangerously with the truth.

"The bittern's eggs are brown," said Korwood.

"I have one."

The fun was kept going off and on all through the afternoon. Then, as it was getting cooler, they decided to return to the hotel for an early tea and to adjourn to the club-house across the road for bridge.

How it would have affected things if they had been content to play their cards in the hotel lounge it is useless to speculate. In the lounge there were often stray callers and a good deal of noise. They preferred the club-house where they generally had the room to themselves.

Of course Korwood's first impulse on their return was to dash for his bird book. He brought it to the tea table, but a most careful search failed to find anything that his unique specimen exactly resembled. There was too much blue for the herring gull or the kittiwake. The egg was too big for the peewit or the plover, and eagles' eggs apparently had very little colouring—nor were eagles likely to nest in those parts.

Then Oxley decided the joke had had a good

enough run. He borrowed the precious treasure to examine it more closely through his monocle and dropped it carelessly on the floor. It split and the yolk was exposed.

Korwood cried out in distress, but Oxley stooped down and with a spoon conveyed some of the yellow food to his mouth.

"Tastes good," he murmured. "I thought it was morning bittern."

Korwood watched him, his eyes bulging in astonishment and horror. Then a shriek of laughter from the rest of the party brought enlightenment, especially as Oxley, with a moistened finger, removed some of the colouring.

"Well, I'm damned."

It was all Korwood could say, and it seemed to meet the case. He certainly took it extraordinarily well. It is not every one who can stand a joke against himself in such good temper. Certainly it was one up for Oxley.

They went across to the club-house, but were at first inclined to retrace their steps. Some men were busy in the dressing-room putting up more lockers, the supply being inadequate. Three of them hammering at the same time made a good deal of noise.

"Shall we go back?" suggested Roger.

But the card-room was empty and with the door shut the noise was not so bad.

"They will knock off soon," said Bardwell. So the play began.

It followed its normal course and no one thought to take special note of who left the room or how long they were away. Roger was out of the first rubber, but he sat by the others watching the play. Later Korwood cut out, and for a time he disappeared.

When he returned, Provost was playing a little slam in hearts. It took a bit of thought. Roger, his partner, seeing that Korwood seemed likely to make some remark, put up his hand to silence him. Korwood stood still at the door. But interruption came from an unexpected quarter.

Rolls, the steward, burst into the room. No staying hand could check him.

"Please come," he said thickly. "Mr. Denton has shot himself!"

CHAPTER FIVE

WHO WAS THERE ?

PROVOST dropped his cards, the others sprang to their feet.

“Denton has shot himself?” repeated Bardwell.
“The first decent thing he has done for years.”

“You don’t mean it?” cried Oxley, though it was evident enough that Rolls was not joking.

“Where is he?” asked Roger.

“In the lounge, sir.”

The “Nineteenth” at Allingham was, for the size of the club, large and comfortable. Between the bar and the fireplace there was a screen or partition about four feet in height. Its broad, flat top made a handy shelf for men to rest their drinks on when they gathered round the bar, while the inner side formed a spacious inglenook with a low padded seat well protected from draught. Unless those who passed through the lounge went close to the screen and deliberately looked over, they could not see any one who sat there. In the winter-time, in front of a blazing fire, it was a very comfortable spot.

It was to this enclosure that Rolls led them. There was no fire that afternoon.

In the centre of the angled seat sprawled the body of Hugh Denton. He had not fallen to the floor, being supported by the cushioned padding. His head slumped over his right shoulder, his legs were stretched out, and his arms hung limply by his side. At his feet lay an illustrated magazine. The window was open.

At first it might have been thought he had fallen

When he returned, Provost was playing a little slam in hearts. It took a bit of thought. Roger, his partner, seeing that Korwood seemed likely to make some remark, put up his hand to silence him. Korwood stood still at the door. But interruption came from an unexpected quarter.

Rolls, the steward, burst into the room. No staying hand could check him.

"Please come," he said thickly. "Mr. Denton has shot himself!"

"Where is his nephew?" asked Provost.

"I don't know, sir. I haven't seen him."

The steward then went to do as had been suggested. The hammering ceased and he waddled to the telephone.

For some moments the men in the lounge did not speak. They were eyeing that sagging body in a sort of fascinated silence.

"You mean it is murder," whispered Korwood at last to Roger.

"Can you suggest anything else?"

"I—I don't know. I read a tale once of a man who shot himself and someone found him, and took the gun away to make it look like murder. Otherwise, they might have lost the insurance money."

"That someone was asking for trouble," said Roger grimly.

The others were still silent. There was something compelling, yet very horrible, in regarding the stiffening body of the man whose coming they had so resented.

"There is no reason for us to wait," said Provost slowly. "It is no affair of ours. We might as well go back to the hotel."

"The police will want to ask some questions," suggested Roger.

"Surely not from us. If they do, they will know where to find us."

Provost turned away, Oxley and Bardwell following him. Korwood hesitated a moment and then joined them. Roger felt a little uncomfortable. They had all been very decent to him; he did not like to break away and act on his own account.

"I think we ought to stay," he said. "We must have been the only people in the place when it happened."

"You can tell everything we know," returned Oxley. "If we did stay they would probably ask us to clear out."

"But I must let them know that he came from your club."

"That is as you see fit," murmured Provost, and in another moment Roger was alone.

He was sorely tempted to follow them. What business was it of his? Crime interested him, yet he would have preferred to stick by his friends. That they detested this Hugh Denton there could be no doubt. His death certainly did not grieve them. Why not adopt their view and leave it to the police, who would in any case question all of them if they thought it necessary?

But something impelled him to remain. Denton, whatever he may have been to them, had done him no wrong, and no man has the right to kill another. It was only decent for one of them to stay. . . .

The hammering had ceased. The silence was almost eerie. Then Rolls was back.

"'Phoned the police, sir. They'll be along any minute. I 'phoned Major Gwyer too. He is coming across."

Roger nodded. They had withdrawn to the bar where they could no longer see that grisly object in the inglenook.

"It looks a bad business, Rolls."

"I'm afraid it does, sir."

"If he was shot, have you any idea who can have done it?"

"None at all, sir. We've never had a thing like this happen before."

That was probably true. Golf clubs do not encourage murder on the premises!

"Did he ever tell you anything about himself?"

"No, sir," wheezed Rolls. "Some of our visitors get very chatty and tell me quite a lot. Sometimes it's their families, sometimes their business, and sometimes only their golf. But Mr. Denton wasn't that way. He asked a lot of questions as to how many members we had and how things were done. He seemed to think we didn't run things quite proper."

"A grumbler?"

"Well, sir, critical."

"Did he always play with his nephew?"

"Not always. I fixed him up once with Mr. Hamilton and once with Mr. Green."

"I thought someone told me that Hamilton and Green always played together because they had quarrelled with every one else."

"That's right, sir, but they fell out."

"So they both played with Denton? Perhaps they will be able to tell us something about him. You say his nephew wasn't here this afternoon?"

"I didn't see him," said Rolls.

"This will be a nasty shock for him. I wonder if my friends will tell him about it."

"Should I 'phone the hotel for him?"

"Not a bad idea," said Roger. "The police are sure to want him."

Rolls again disappeared into the telephone cupboard. He was soon back.

"They say the nephew, Mr. Cross, has left."

"Left? When did he go?"

"Been gone best part of an hour, sir."

"That rather complicates things. I suppose they will wire for him. What time did Mr. Denton get here?"

"He came in just before you and those other gentlemen, sir."

"He was here before us, was he? I didn't see him. That would be about half-past four?"

"That's right, sir. He said he was waiting for someone."

"Did he say who it was?"

"No, sir. He went and sat down where we found him."

"Did his friend come?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't see any one."

"You mean no one came for him at all?"

"Not while I was in the bar. It's a quiet time and I was in my room at the back. People press the bell when they want anything."

"Then how did you happen to find him?"

"Well, sir, I went to ask those dratted carpenters how long they were going to be with that hammering. It was rather getting on my nerves. They told me they wanted to finish to-night. Coming back, I looked round the corner here to make sure Mr. Denton had gone. But he hadn't. At first I thought he was asleep. Then I saw the blood and—and I came for you. It's a nasty thing to happen, sir. Major Gwyer won't like it at all. Gives a club a bad name."

"Such things are soon forgotten," said Roger.

Major Gwyer was the first to arrive. He had not so far to come, but before he could do more than glance at the victim of the tragedy, a police car pulled up and four men alighted.

Inspector Beard was in charge. He knew Major Gwyer and asked to be told the facts of the case.

"I think Rolls had better tell you," said the captain of the club.

"We'll take some photographs," said Beard when he had had a good look at the dead man. "Better not touch anything till the doctor comes. May be a bit of delay; he was attending a case."

Beard seemed a very capable fellow, with keen eyes, a big nose and a rat-trap of a mouth. The sort of man who would seize very quickly on anything he regarded as suspicious and would not easily let it go.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Name of Denton, sir," replied the steward. "No one here knows him but that is the name he put on the visitors' book."

"Let me see it."

Murphy

Rolls brought the book and showed the entry.

"Hugh Denton, Wandleton Park," read the inspector. "That's London, isn't it? You don't get many Londoners at this time of year?"

"Not many from anywhere," said Major Gwyer; "but enough to keep us going."

"The next name," said Roger, "is, I believe, of his nephew, Norman Cross. We 'phoned to the hotel to let him know what had happened and were told he left this afternoon."

"Before or after this man was killed?" asked Beard quickly.

"We do not know," said Roger.

"We must get him back. Ah, what is this?" He had turned a page. "Four other men also from Wandleton Park. They still here?"

"Yes, sir," said Rolls.

"That means they are members of the same club, doesn't it? So they must know him."

"They are in the hotel," said Roger. "They will, of course, tell you all they can."

"I hope so. Who are you?"

Roger gave his name and address, and said he also had come from London, but he did not know Hugh Denton.

Major Gwyer suggested they might as well sit

down a little farther away, and the inspector could continue his questions until the doctor came.

"Who found the body?"

Rolls hesitated a moment and then said, "I did."

"When?"

"It was just turned half-past five."

"Sure of that?"

"Quite sure. Some carpenters were hammering up a number of new lockers in the dressing-room, and I went and told them the time, and suggested they should knock off."

"Did they?"

"No. They said they wanted to finish. But we stopped 'em later and I told 'em to wait."

"How does that fix the time when you found the body?"

"Because it was when I came back from them that I looked round the corner and saw it."

"Then what did you do?"

"I went to the card-room where Mr. Bennion and his friends were playing and I said would they please come—Mr. Denton had shot himself."

"Why did you say he had shot himself?" snapped Beard. "Did you see the gun?"

"No. There wasn't a gun."

"Then why did you say he had shot himself?"

"I—I don't rightly know." Rolls was a bit ruffled, but he stood his ground fairly well. "I saw the blood and I guessed it was that way."

"We don't want any guessing," said Beard severely. "If there was no weapon he couldn't have done it himself, and if someone else did it, how can you tell whether he was shot or stabbed?"

Rolls was rather abashed, but he had another suggestion.

"Shot through the open window," he muttered.

"Whose fool idea is that?" returned Beard. "The window is on his left and he was shot over the right ear."

"Can you tell exactly where he was when the shot was fired?" asked Major Gwyer.

"Must have been where he is now," said the inspector. "If he had been by the window he would have fallen to the ground. It's a hundred to one he was leaning back in that seat, wedged in the corner, or he'd have toppled over."

"I expect you are right," nodded Gwyer.

"His hair is slightly singed," said Roger. "The weapon must have been held close to his head."

"I know all about that," growled Beard; "but I want people to answer questions, not to start guessing." He turned again to the steward. "You saw him dead at five-thirty—when did you last see him alive?"

"About half-past four. He had a double whisky and took it into the cubby-hole, as they call it. He said he was waiting for someone."

"Did the someone come?"

"I don't know."

"Weren't you in the bar?"

"I went into my room at the back and shut the door. It kept out some of the noise."

"You didn't hear a shot?"

"I shouldn't if he was stabbed," retorted Rolls in his wheezy way.

"Did you hear a shot?" said Beard more sharply.

"I did not. No one would with all that hammering."

"And you say you were away at the back from half-past four to half-past five?"

"I didn't say that at all. There is a bell and if any one wanted me I came."

A good many people when questioned by the police adopt a defensive attitude. They feel they have to be careful what they say ; there may be a catch somewhere. It appeared to be that way with Rolls. He seemed to see implied criticism and he resented it.

"Look here, my good man," said the inspector in a more friendly tone, "you ought to be able to help me, and I want you to do your best. How many people did you see come in here after Denton arrived ? "

Rolls considered for a moment.

"Mr. Bennion and his friends, and after that Mr. Ferrowe, Mr. Norton, Mr. Miller and Mr. Benting. They had been playing together."

"That all ? "

"I saw Miss Venne and Miss Gainer, but they did not actually come in, so far as I know. When I was outside I saw them go to the ladies' quarters."

"You only came into the bar when someone rang for a drink ? "

"That's right."

"A bit slack, isn't it ? "

"If your day's work began at eight in the morning and went on till eight or nine at night you might want to take the weight off your feet sometimes."

Rolls was indignant.

"We do not find him slack," said Major Gwyer quietly. "Quite the reverse."

"All right," said Beard. "What I mean is, those you have mentioned are the only ones who had drinks ? "

"Not all of them," returned Rolls. "Mr. Ferrowe had a whisky, Mr. Miller a sherry and later on Mr. Oxley came out for what he called a quick one—a pink gin."

"And that is all?"

"That is all I served. People may have gone to the locker room—I don't know. We don't serve many drinks round tea-time and the members mostly go home to tea."

"Seems a very small number for a fine afternoon," commented Beard.

"Not for a Friday at this time of year. Plenty more to-morrow. Our regulars mostly play one round, generally in the morning."

"I think you can rely on what Rolls tells you," said Major Gwyer. "I myself came in during the afternoon to see how the carpenters were getting on."

"Yes, sir," said Rolls, "but that was earlier."

Beard's assistant had taken down all that Rolls had said and the inspector now turned to Roger.

"Do I understand that you and your friends were in the card-room when it happened?"

"It would seem so," said Roger.

"Can you give me their names?"

"Provost, Oxley, Korwood and Bardwell. They are still staying in the hotel."

"But those are the men from his own club," said Beard in his quick way.

"That is right."

"You told me Denton was unknown, but it appears that four men who probably knew him quite well were here all the time. What have you to say about that?"

His question was again to Rolls, who shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"I was alluding to our members," he said. "Can't answer for strangers."

"Huh," grunted the inspector. Then he turned again to Roger. "This man says Denton got here about four-thirty and was found dead at five-thirty."

You and your friends were in the card-room all that time?"

"More or less," said Roger. "We had tea in the hotel and then came across. I cannot say exactly when we got here."

"Did you see Denton when you arrived?"

"Personally, I did not."

"Did you and your friends remain all the time in the card-room—that is until the steward came to you."

"I did."

"And the others?"

Roger wished he could say they had. His friends' dislike for Denton had been very pronounced, but it was unthinkable that they had had anything to do with his death. If he could swear that no one had left the card-room during the hour in question, no suggestion of their complicity could arise. But Rolls had already said that Oxley had come out, and he remembered Korwood's return shortly before the steward had burst in on them with the news. Bardwell, too, he thought, had slipped away for a time. He was not sure about Provost.

"When there are five of you for bridge," he said slowly, "one must cut out. Also the dummy sometimes leaves the table for a minute or two."

"I know all about that," said Beard. "I am asking if to your knowledge any of your companions went out while this man Denton was there?"

"My impression is that some of them did," said Roger. "I was too interested in the cards to take special notice. In any case they were away for a very short time."

"The man who shot Denton did not take long about it," said the inspector grimly.

"But he had to be armed," retorted Roger. "We

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don't play cards in this country with guns in our pockets."

"Some one had a gun. Were these friends of yours on good terms with the man who came from their own club?"

That again was an awkward question and one to which the reply might easily give exaggerated ideas. Luckily Major Gwyer came to the rescue.

"Mr. Bennion may not know that," he suggested quietly. "I believe he met these gentlemen for the first time this week. Surely it is a question to put to them."

"That is so," said Roger.

"Of course I shall put it to them," declared Beard. And then Rolls made an unexpected statement.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Korwood was standing by the body when I came back after speaking to the carpenters."

"What is that?" cried Roger. "Mr. Korwood was standing by the body?"

"That's right, sir."

"Why didn't you say so before?"

Again Rolls looked uncomfortable. "I thought perhaps you knew," he wheezed.

"How could Mr. Bennion know?" queried the inspector sharply.

"Mr. Korwood went to the card-room just before I did. He might have told them. I came to ask what I had best do."

"But Korwood hadn't mentioned it?" Beard put this to Roger.

"No," was the reluctant reply. "But I do not quite understand it. Where exactly was Korwood when you saw him?"

"He was leaving the enclosure," said Rolls, "turning away like, as I came in from the passage."

"You did not actually see him by the body, but at the entrance to the enclosure?"

"That's right," said Rolls.

"Looks good enough," pronounced Beard. "Had he anything in his hand?"

"Only his pipe."

"Sure it was his pipe?"

"Sure as I can be," muttered the steward.

Then they were told the doctor had arrived. He was a very cheery looking man and seemed to inspire confidence and liking. He knew both Major Gwyer and the inspector.

"Well, what is this all about?" he asked.

"A man, a visitor to the club, has been found dead," said Beard; "apparently shot."

He led the way to where the body still sat with sagged head in the corner of the lounge.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Dr. Charlot. "I know this man!"

"You know him?" queried the inspector.

"I mean I have seen him play," muttered Charlot, busy with dexterous fingers. "Two days ago Colonel Shorne and I were behind him. He was cutting the biggest divots I have ever seen and not replacing one of them. If any one killed him it should have been you, Gwyer. He was murdering your beautiful course."

No one replied. For some moments there was silence.

"What do you want me to tell you?" asked Charlot more gravely.

"How he was killed and when," replied Beard.

"How, seems fairly simple. Shot in the head, probably with a small calibre revolver. The bullet is still there. There is a bruise on the right side of the mouth, the lip is swollen. It suggests a struggle, but had nothing to do with the actual cause of death."

"If he had been shot in a struggle," suggested Roger, "wouldn't he have fallen to the ground? Do you mean he was propped into the corner afterwards?"

Charlot was thoughtful for a moment, making another examination through a magnifying glass.

"I should say he was shot where he was sitting. The bruise was already there."

"The shot would cause instant death?" asked Major Gwyer.

"What we call instant death," said Charlot. "The laceration of the brain paralyses action, although for a time the heart may continue to beat. But you ought not to be here, Gwyer. This sort of thing won't do you any good, and it doesn't really concern the club."

He spoke as medical adviser as well as a friend. But Gwyer shook his head.

"They sent for me," he said.

"Take my advice and go home and forget it," said the doctor. Then he turned to Beard. "As to time, within the last two hours."

"We know that, sir. It was between four-thirty and five-thirty. Can you fix it any closer?"

"If I could it would only be a guess. Better take it away and I'll let you have my report as soon as I can."

"Could you say definitely that it was before five-thirty?" asked Roger.

"Why?" inquired Charlot, looking curiously at him.

"It is alleged that a friend of mine was seen by his side at five-thirty. If the shot was before then it lets him out."

"Sorry," said Charlot. "Such precision in these cases is quite impossible."

CHAPTER SIX

KORWOOD EXPLAINS

"I WANT each of you to tell me who you are and what you know of the dead man."

So spoke Inspector Beard. He was in the hotel and he confronted the four friends from Wandleton Park. He had seen the carpenters in the club-house, but their stories were too vague to help him. There had been a few people in and out of the dressing-room, but their job had to be finished. They were too busy to notice any one in particular and they had heard no shot. Roger was with Beard, but Major Gwyer on Dr. Charlot's advice had gone home.

"That will not be difficult," replied Provost, in his cool even manner. It seemed natural that he should be the spokesman for the party. He gave his own name and address and said he was a publisher. Roger had heard of his firm and knew it specialised in books for children.

"Hugh Denton," Provost continued, "was a member of our golf club, but we never played with him there, and we did not play with him here."

"Did you know he was coming here?" asked Beard.

"We did not."

"It was a complete surprise to you when he arrived?"

"If you like to put it that way. He of course had as much right here as we have."

"Did you ask why he had come?"

"Presumably he came to play golf. I did not speak to him."

"Wasn't that rather curious, he being a member of your own club?"

"There are seven hundred members of our club," replied Provost. "Most of them I do not know either by name or by sight. I do not suppose in the course of a year I play with more than twelve—or say twenty—different people."

"That is so with all of us," added Korwood, "and with most other members too. You play with your own set."

"Did you know anything of Denton's private life?"

"I do not even know where he lived," answered Provost. "You will of course be able to get some particulars here and more perhaps from our club secretary."

"Did you leave the card-room between four-thirty and five-thirty?"

"I did. I had run out of matches and I went to the lounge for some. I brought the match-stand back with me."

"Did you see or speak to Denton?"

"I did not."

"How long were you away?"

"Two minutes at the outside."

"Did you see any one at all?"

"Nobody."

"What Provost has told you goes for me too," said Oxley. He stated that he was a company director and lived in Wandleton. He had gone out for a drink and the steward had served him. He had not seen Denton.

Bardwell, it appeared, was an architect. He had not played with Denton and had never met him either privately or in business. He had gone to the dressing-room for a few minutes, but otherwise had

been all the time in the card-room. He had not seen Denton or any one but the carpenters.

Roger listened to all that was said. No doubt it was true, but was it the whole truth? To him they had declared their detestation of the dead man in no measured terms. There must be some explanation for that. Yet there was no hint of anything of the sort in what they were now saying.

"You?"

There was just the slightest difference in tone as the inspector turned to Korwood, purposely left to the last.

"I am Charles Korwood. I live at Wandleton and work in the Foreign Office. I have never played with Denton."

"That all you can tell me?"

"I am afraid it is," said Korwood.

"It is not!" returned Beard curtly. "I warn you that what you say will be taken down and may be used as evidence. So be careful. If you would rather not reply, you are not bound to do so."

Korwood was utterly taken aback. His chin dropped and his eyes stared. The rest of the party looked almost equally surprised at this sudden change of manner.

"I—I don't understand."

"I think you do," retorted Beard. "When Denton was shot you were seen standing beside the body. What have you to say about that?"

"I—I——"

Korwood seemed too dumbfounded to give a coherent reply. His friends looked at him as though not knowing what to make of it.

"I—I didn't know he was shot."

"Then how did you suppose he had been killed?"

There was an unpleasant edge to the inspector's

words. The suddenness of his attack had been startling, but Korwood soon recovered himself.

"You say I was seen standing beside the body?" he asked.

"I do."

"Who saw me?"

"That is my business," snapped Beard. "Do you admit it?"

"Yes—I do," said Korwood, but there was fight in his tone.

"Did you shoot him?"

"I did not."

"Have you a gun?"

"I have not."

"But you found the body. What did you do then?"

"I did not know it was a body—that is, not a dead one. It is all very simple. I was not playing cards, and I strolled out to wash my hands. I also went for a minute or two to the porch, reading the notices and that sort of thing. Coming back through the lounge I looked into that enclosure to see if any one was there and the only person I saw was Denton. At first I thought he was asleep; then I thought he might be ill."

"Ill! Bleeding from a wound in the head!"

"I didn't see any blood."

"So what did you do?"

"I went to my friends in the card-room to tell them, and to ask what we ought to do."

"What did they say?"

"I didn't ask them. I meant to suggest that Provost should have a look at him, but he was playing the hand and I didn't like to interrupt."

"The cards were more important than murder?" Beard sounded sceptical.

"I did not know it was murder. I never even thought of such a thing. From where I stood he looked all right, except that he was mighty queer. But I only waited a minute or two and then the steward burst into the room and told us Denton had shot himself."

"That is how it happened," said Roger. "When Korwood came into the room I signalled to him not to speak."

"You want me to believe," muttered Beard, "that you saw a murdered man and you just thought he was unwell?"

"I can't help your beliefs," answered Korwood, "but that is how it was."

There were more questions, but they brought no further information. The inspector was obviously far from satisfied; he said he would report to his superiors so that inquiries might be made in London. Meanwhile he must ask none of them to go away without letting him know.

Dressing for dinner at that hotel did not mean donning formal attire, but as Roger got into his dark suit he asked himself some questions it was not easy to answer. His interest as a student of crime was keenly aroused by what had happened, but he did not know that he wanted to work with Inspector Beard. It was equally true that Inspector Beard, having no knowledge of any success he might have had in connection with other mysterious killings, had even less idea of working with him. But who was Hugh Denton? Why had he been shot? What was the reason for the intense dislike with which his fellow clubmen regarded him? Why had they so carefully concealed their true feelings from the inspector?

What, after all, did he know of Provost, Oxley,

Bardwell and Korwood? He had played a few games of golf with them. They had been very decent to him and he would have described them as sound fellows in every way. Yet they had disliked Denton, and Denton had been killed. More than that, there was no denying that any one of them could have done the killing.

That Inspector Beard suspected them was obvious enough. His view undoubtedly was that if a stranger came to Allingham and was murdered, the murderer must be someone who knew him. So far as present information went those members of his own club were the only people who did know him—apart, of course, from his nephew.

The abrupt departure of the nephew was certainly curious, but Inspector Beard could be relied on to inquire into the time and circumstances of his going. Korwood's account of his sensations on seeing the body might well be true. Denton looked queer, but he was still sitting up. As they were not on speaking terms, he went to consult Provost. That might explain Korwood, but it did not explain the others.

Roger was the last at the table and for some while they all were silent.

"I suppose, Bennion," said Provost, after a time, "you are itching to help the police?"

"Why do you suppose that?" returned Roger. "I take it we all want to see justice done."

"I should say justice has been done," muttered Bardwell.

"How so?" asked Roger.

"Denton was an utter rotter and deserved what he got."

"If you know that should you not have told the inspector your reasons?"

"To help him catch someone who had done a very worthy action? I don't see it that way at all."

Bardwell spoke almost vindictively, but before Roger could reply, Korwood broke in on a lighter note.

"Fancy my being warned that what I said would be used as evidence! I must tell that to my girl Audrey and my wife. They will be thrilled."

"Still more thrilled," said Oxley, "when they visit you in gaol. Half an hour once a week, I believe it is."

"I think the inspector, like Bennion, had his eye on all of us," observed Provost.

"Please don't include me," said Roger. "I would hate to be a policeman."

"It will create a bit of a stir when they hear of it in town," remarked Korwood. "'The Golf House Murder!' The papers will be full of it."

"I expect they will call it 'The Crime at the Nineteenth,'" suggested Oxley.

"Who first christened the bar the nineteenth?" inquired Korwood.

"Many of our brightest geniuses are unknown," said Provost. "A noted judge called it the alco-hole, and thinks that may prove his greatest claim to fame."

"Who invented the names of the clubs?" asked Oxley. "Driver and putter explain themselves, but why mashie and niblick?"

"You must search the old Scottish records," said Roger. "I don't know what she called her clubs, but Mary Queen of Scots played golf. Perhaps she was the first lady golfer."

"Is that a fact?" asked Korwood.

"It is. She was accused of playing golf a few days

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after Darnley's death. It was regarded as evidence
of her guilt."

"I never heard that before. I knew laws were
passed against it because it interfered with the
practice of archery."

"Perhaps Flodden Field was lost on the links of
Scotland," suggested Provost. "The Scots had spent
too much time with their putters and too little with
their pikes."

So they chatted on. Was it the talk of men with
murder on their souls?

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCERNING NORMAN CROSS

INSPECTOR BEARD had not been idle, and after dinner it was learned that he had gone away with information that he regarded as of the highest importance.

"Come here, you chaps," said Korwood excitedly to his friends, "George will tell you all about it."

George was the cocktail expert. Korwood led them to the sanctum where he presided.

"Tell them what you told the inspector. It is pretty horrible, but thank heaven it clears things up."

The man of many mixtures was nothing loath. He foresaw both fame and profit in the tale he was able to unfold.

"I am not saying it had anything to do with the murder," he began. "I hope it hadn't. He seemed a pleasant young gentleman in his way."

"Who?" asked Bardwell.

"Mr. Cross, Mr. Denton's nephew."

"They had a fight!" put in Korwood, who wanted him to get on with the story.

"Here?" asked Provost.

"That's right," nodded George. "This afternoon. Mr. Denton had got a drink and a paper and was settling down quiet when his nephew came in. They started quarrelling, but I couldn't hear what they said till the nephew shouted, 'You shan't do it, you devil! I won't let you!' The uncle told him to remember where he was or who he was, or some-

thing like that. 'You are just a boy,' he said, and that infuriated the young gent. He jumped at him and hit him a real corker in the mouth. Loosened a tooth or two, I reckon."

"Good lad!" muttered Bardwell.

"That accounts for the damaged lip," said Roger. "What happened next?"

"The uncle hit back. Before I could do anything he got in one that sent the nephew sprawling on the floor. Twice his weight, of course. I ran round and said they mustn't carry on like that here. I helped the boy up. He was half-crying and kept muttering, 'You shan't do it. I'll kill you first.'"

"He said that?" asked Roger. "You are sure?"

"He said it all right, sir, but I never thought he meant it."

"Of course you reported it to the inspector?"

"Had to, sir."

"What did Denton say?" asked Oxley.

"He just laughed and told him again that he was only a boy."

"Then what happened?" inquired Provost.

"Well, sir, the young gent hit his head against a table when his uncle knocked him down; a nasty crack it was, and I bathed it for him. Then I gave him a drink. His uncle was watching him contemptuous-like. 'He wants cooling down a bit,' he said, and the lad was still muttering things. 'Now clear out,' said the uncle. 'I will,' said the young gent, 'and I hope I never see you again.' He was still so angry that he ran straight into Mr. Ernest Gwyer, the Major's brother, who happened to be outside; nearly knocked him over."

"What did Denton do when he had gone?" asked Roger.

"He looked at his lip and swore horrible. He had

another drink and then said he would get something for it. That was the last I saw of him."

Undoubtedly George enjoyed telling his story, and his own air punches, illustrating the blows he had seen struck, made it very realistic.

"You have no idea what they were quarrelling about?" asked Roger.

"No, sir. The nephew said something about a letter. I've never seen any one so furious."

"He threatened to kill his uncle, and you believe he did it?"

"Well, sir, you must put two and two together, as they say."

"What time was this fight?"

"After three; might have been nearly half-past."

"And what time did young Cross leave the hotel?"

If he had gone at once, or at any time before four-thirty, no question of his guilt could arise, whatever the threats he had used. At four-thirty Denton had been speaking to Rolls in the clubhouse.

"I didn't see him go, sir," said George, "but it seems it was about five o'clock."

"Five o'clock!" echoed Roger. "What was he doing for nearly two hours?"

"I couldn't say, sir. The inspector questioned us very careful about it. It appears the young gent changed his clothes and packed his bag. Perhaps he bathed his head a bit, too."

"For two hours?" asked Korwood.

"All we know, sir, is that it was nigh on five o'clock when he went to the office. He told 'em he was going, and would pay his own bill. He said the car was his and he went off in it."

Then Provost put the crucial question.

"Is it known whether or not he went to the clubhouse?"

"It's known he did, sir. He told the porter he must get his clubs."

"That was about five o'clock?" asked Roger.

"Yes, sir. He went across while they made up his account."

"Poor devil," said Oxley. "There doesn't seem much doubt, but I'm sorry for him."

"What did Inspector Beard say about it?" inquired Korwood.

"He said he must get him back as sharp as he could."

"You believe he did it?" asked Bardwell again.

"Well, sir, I heard him say he'd do it, and he went across and done it. I can't really see it any way else."

"Where did he get the gun?" asked Roger.

"The gun, sir?"

"Yes. Denton was shot. Would young Cross have a gun with him?"

"Maybe it was Denton's own gun," said Korwood.

"Why should either Denton or Cross bring a gun with them on a golfing holiday?"

To that there was no answer, and, as George had nothing more to tell them, they made their way to their usual corner in the lounge.

"Did Cross live with his uncle?"

Provost put the question to Korwood, who was the one of them who made friends most quickly and was often well informed on such matters. He did not disappoint.

"He lives in rooms in South Kensington, by himself. I had a talk with him one day. He seemed quite a decent lad. He is with a firm of engineers and Denton was his guardian. So I suppose he is

under age and may have money coming to him."

"Perhaps they quarrelled about money," said Oxley.

"The quarrel is not to his discredit," commented Provost. "I hope it will prove there was nothing worse."

"What was really wrong with Denton?" asked Roger bluntly. "You have all hinted that he was an outsider, but you never say in what way. And you left Inspector Beard to infer that he was an ordinary, decent sort of chap, but he didn't just happen to be one of your pals. Was that quite fair? One does not speak ill of the dead, but when a fellow is murdered the way he lived may be a guide to why he died."

Roger's previous inquiries had been disregarded or turned aside, but this was too direct an appeal to be treated in that way.

"If we hated him," said Provost dryly, "and we were on the spot when he was shot, did you expect us to announce the fact?"

"You could have kept your personal feelings out of it, but you might have said the sort of man he was."

"The police will find out," said Oxley.

"But only by people telling them," retorted Roger.

"To put it in a word," said Provost, "Denton was a woman-chaser of the most objectionable kind."

"A woman-chaser," echoed Roger. "There had been trouble at your club?"

"There certainly had. We are not narrow-minded, and in these days one doesn't try to see more than one must, but when things become blatant you cannot pretend to be blind."

"I cannot imagine what made him so attractive," muttered Korwood.

"The handsome animal—very much animal—appeals to a certain type of woman," said Provost.

"Was it a divorce?" asked Roger.

"There was a divorce years ago. Perhaps more than one, but wives know what they are about when they let their husbands down and are often as much to blame as the men. Besides, that sort of thing may mean money damages. Denton was always after young girls."

"You didn't kick him out of your club?"

"We wanted to," said Korwood. "That was just the trouble."

"Not long ago," Provost went on, "he was carrying on with a girl of about nineteen, a member of the club. She was foolish, of course, but things went rather too far. We had him before the committee and asked him to resign."

"He refused?"

"He did," said Provost. "I was captain of the club at the time, so I had to conduct the business. It was not pleasant. He refused to resign and he defied us to expel him. He said if we did, he would bring a libel action."

"That would have meant your showing the expulsion was justified?"

"Exactly. A whole lot of dirty linen would have been brought into court and the girl's life might have been ruined. Her father and mother are delightful people and for their sake as well as hers we had to let it drop. The girl was sent abroad, but he remained, no doubt to carry on as before."

"That might supply the motive for his murder," said Roger.

"Call it execution," muttered Bardwell.

"It might," agreed Provost in his dry way, "but you have had my story and you must wait for what young Norman Cross has to say."

"Why is it," asked Korwood, "that a man with such a rotten reputation has more attraction for a lot of women than an ordinary decent-liver?"

"Because the decent-liver is ordinary," said Oxley. "Woman wants to be thrilled. She wonders what his charm is and tries to find out. She tells herself she will not let him go too far."

"Aren't men equally drawn to notorious women?" suggested Provost. "If you heard a Nell Gwynne was alone in the next room, wouldn't you all be tumbling over one another to get to her?"

"If she were alone," laughed Roger, "she would have been here before we could get to her. Was Denton married?" His interest was still on the crime.

"He never produced a wife," said Korwood, "but the police will soon get all that cleared up."

"By the way," Oxley said to him, "I am fearfully sorry I smashed that egg of yours. I have now found out what it really was. It is very rare—the Crested Spooft!"

There was a laugh, and Provost said he did not agree.

"It is either the Greater or the Lesser Diddle," he declared. "It nests sometimes in chestnut trees but more often in hoax!"

But the jests fell flat. How far away that light-hearted picnic party seemed! They were all for an early bed.

"What about our second round matches?" asked Roger.

"I vote we leave them till Monday," said Bardwell. "Perhaps by then this beastly business will be cleared up."

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN THE NIGHT

ROGER had not mentioned one fact. He had retained the score sheets of the afternoon's play. When he got to his room he examined them to see if they would throw any light on what might have happened.

If Norman Cross had killed his uncle that ended the matter. But if he had not, the guilty party must either be one of his friends, who admittedly and apparently with reason detested the murdered man, or it must be someone who as yet escaped suspicion. Would the details of play help?

One rubber had been completed and a second started. There had been four hands in all, the last not being finished. So assuming they had started at four-thirty, which was no doubt correct, each hand had averaged about fifteen minutes. They were not slow players.

In the first rubber Provost and Oxley were against Korwood and Bardwell. He remembered it perfectly well as he had sat by, watching. Oxley had played the opening game in four hearts, which he had made. Provost was dummy and it must have been then that he had gone out for the matches. So he was back by a quarter to five.

If any one saw Denton alive after a quarter to five it let out Provost.

Korwood played the second hand, four no-trumps doubled. Bardwell had been dummy and it must therefore have been between, say, ten minutes to five and five minutes past when he went out. Korwood was one down.

The third hand, a call of four spades by Provost, had been made and Oxley, the dummy, must presumably have gone then for his "quick one," between five-five and five-twenty. He saw Rolls who served his drink.

That had ended the first rubber. Korwood had cut out, and Roger and Provost were together. Roger raised his partner's call to six hearts and during the play Korwood had left them and—according to his story—had seen the dead man without realising he was dead. He came back, to be followed soon after by Rolls who told them of the tragedy.

During which of those four periods had the shot been fired?

Young Cross had come for his clubs at about five o'clock. That would be very near to the time Bardwell went out. Rolls mentioned two men, Ferrowe and Miller, to whom he had served drinks during the vital hour. Had they seen anything? Their evidence should nearly cover one at least of the four periods. Did Ferrowe or Miller know Denton? Had either of them reason to kill him? Eight people had been at or close to the scene of the crime during the hour in which it was committed—his four friends, Ferrowe and Miller, Norman Cross, and Rolls, the steward. If they were all guiltless, could some other person have come and gone without one of them seeing anything?

Much, of course, would depend on what young Cross had to say. That such a boy could be a murderer was a horrible thought—but if he had not shot his uncle—who had?

Roger completed his notes and slipped into bed. He was not to sleep undisturbed. It was nearly half-past one when he was awakened by the sound of

voices, followed by something of a scuffle, in the adjoining room. The room which had been occupied by the murdered man.

That the police should take charge of the victim's apartment was in the ordinary course of events. That they should lock the door was also what would be expected of them. But that they should leave the key in the lock seemed a gross dereliction of duty.

At something after one o'clock, when the whole place was wrapped in silence, when all innocent people should have been slumbering peacefully, that key was gently turned and a figure clad in a long dark dressing-gown slipped noiselessly into the room and closed the door.

It stood motionless on the threshold for some moments and then the ray of a torch was switched all round the apartment.

It was a simple bedroom, just like any of the others. The unused bed on which the dead man had slept the night before was shrouded in its coverlet. Some boots were in the fender. A coat was cast carelessly over a chair. His brushes were on the dressing-table; his shaving tackle and sponge on the washstand fitment with its gleaming taps. The long dark curtains were drawn, completely covering the bay window. Then the ray of the torch rested on the chest of drawers. On it there was a discarded collar, a tin of tobacco, a spare pipe and a cheap novel. Who could say what might be in the drawers?

The intruder had brought the door key in with him. He put it in the lock and turned it. Now he was safe from interruption. It was no longer necessary to use his torch. He clicked the electric switch and flooded the whole room with light.

He went at once to the chest of drawers. There

were two short drawers at the top and three longer ones below. The first of the top pair that he cautiously opened obviously had nothing to interest him—ties, handkerchiefs and such things. Gently he closed it. Then equally gently, so that no sound might be made, he pulled open the one adjoining. That seemed more promising!

His eager fingers seized a small bundle of papers. Quickly he turned them over. He did not stop to read their contents. He seemed to know the one for which he was looking. There it was! With a grunt of relief he released it from the wire clip that held them all together and thrust it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. The rest he returned to the drawer which, with the same care as before, he pushed back into its normal position.

Now it only remained to open the door and slip back into the passage without being seen. He turned the lock. It would be best to switch off the light. . . .

"Hand over them papers!"

With what seemed like a tearing crash the long curtains over the window recess were flung apart, and a young constable sprang into the room.

The panic-stricken intruder, almost too startled to know what he was doing, fumbled with the door-handle in the vain hope of escape.

"None of that!"

The constable seized his arm in a relentless grip.

"He was my friend . . . I have done no harm . . . I only thought perhaps——"

"You took a letter. 'And it over. You'll come with me."

"But, constable, you must let me explain. It is all a mistake. . . ."

"Your mistake," said the constable. *"You'd better come quiet. Give me that paper, whatever*

it is, and I'll wait while you put some clothes on."

He had no need to hush his voice, and it was his firm tones that stirred Roger to action. He sprang from his bed and was in the adjoining room in time to hear the repeated plea, "Let me explain!"

The grip of the law was not gentle. A firm hand held the sleeve of the dressing-gown. And the man in the dressing-gown was James Oxley.

"'And over that paper!"

There was nothing else to be done. Oxley obeyed.

"It was a private note from me to Denton. There is no harm in it. You can see that for yourself. But I wanted it back."

"What is the trouble?" asked Roger from the doorway.

"I caught this man committing a felony," said the constable. "The inspector weren't satisfied about some of the folk in the 'otel. 'Conceal yourself in the room,' he said to me, 'and see if any one comes. If they come, don't let 'em go.' He knows a thing or two, does Inspector Beard."

Constable Cowper may have been proud of his superior officer; he undoubtedly saw credit for himself for so ably carrying out instructions.

"It is only a letter," protested Oxley, "a perfectly innocent letter. Read it yourself. Put it back if you like. It makes no difference. Tell him, Bennion, that Denton was a member of our club."

Oxley was scared. It was astute of Inspector Beard to lay such a trap and foolish of Oxley to walk into it. His so doing was hardly consistent with what the four friends had said as to their having no dealings with the dead man.

"Why not read it, constable?" said Roger. "If it seems innocent, and you are satisfied he took nothing else, would it not be best to let him go back

to bed? You don't want to rouse the whole place, and Inspector Beard will deal with it in the morning."

Constable Cowper had been a little in doubt as to the best course to adopt. He had no immediate means of taking his man to the station, and to do so would entail deserting his post. He took the letter from his pocket and read it audibly.

Dear Denton,

Here are the figures you asked for. We are going down on the fifth. You know how it is with the others so don't expect me to look pleased at seeing you. We can each do just as well on our own.

Yours,

Jas. Oxley.

"Don't see much 'arm in that," muttered the constable, perhaps a little disappointed, "but you never know. And it was a felony."

"There is no harm in it," said Oxley eagerly. "Any one can see that. I suppose you must report it to your inspector, but I can explain it all to him. Please don't mention it to any one else."

"Which is your room?" Cowper demanded.

"No. 27, the other side of the passage."

"All right. Go there, and don't try any tricks. You'd better stay there till I say you can come out."

"I will, but may Mr. Bennion come with me for a minute or two? I want to tell him about it."

"I suppose so."

Oxley apparently took it for granted that Roger would follow him to his room. He was undoubtedly shaken and desired help or advice.

"Have a drink?" He went to the bottle of whisky and the siphon of soda that had the place of honour on his mantelshelf.

"No, thanks," said Roger.

"I will."

He poured himself a good portion of spirit and did not linger with the siphon. He swallowed the mixture quickly, and it did him good.

"I am in a devil of a mess," he muttered.

"It was rather asking for trouble to try to burgle Denton's room," said Roger.

"Who could imagine they'd hide a fellow behind a curtain?"

"I expect that was the fellow's own idea when he heard someone at the door."

"I thought there might be a man on duty. If there had been I should have told him the door was unlocked and I considered they ought to have been more careful."

"But as there was apparently no one on duty you decided to take what you wanted?"

"You saw the letter," replied Oxley quickly. "No harm in it, was there?"

"It might give Inspector Beard ideas."

"How do you mean?"

"You and the others told him that Denton's coming here was a pure coincidence, that you hardly knew him. That letter makes it appear that he came by arrangement with you. Beard may argue that the person who killed him must have known he would be here to be killed."

Oxley stared at him for some moments in silence.

"Young Cross killed him," he said.

"Perhaps—if it can be shown how Cross got a gun."

"I hadn't a gun."

"Beard may want to be convinced of that," said Roger quietly.

"You are not going to suggest that he will really think I shot Denton?"

"I suggest that you have done your best to make him think it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Oxley. "It isn't that at all. You heard the letter. Don't you see—it is Provost and the others I was thinking about?"

"I do not see," said Roger.

Oxley took another drink, and it seemed to restore something of his ordinary manner.

"Look here, old chap, I'll tell you the whole thing, and then perhaps you can help me. I am not saying that Denton wasn't a blackguard in some ways. Plenty of men have their fun with women and nothing is said about it. He perhaps went a bit further than most and didn't care who knew it. But what men do in that way isn't our affair, is it?"

"Provost seemed to think it so blatant that it became every one's affair."

"But what I mean," persisted Oxley, "is this. If you have a business deal with a man—your stockbroker or a fellow who has something to sell—you don't ask about his private life?"

"Not as a rule."

"Very well, then. Provost is a great pal of mine, and so is Korwood and Bardwell. We had talked of having a holiday together and Bardwell persuaded us to come here. I mentioned the place to a man in the city, and he told me he had heard privately that the Allingham course, with the hotel and a lot of adjoining land, was in the market."

"You heard that?" said Roger.

"I did, and it seemed to me it might be a damned good spec. Building sites adjoining golf courses go up in value every day. Such a place with a bit of push might easily double or treble its value."

"So you told Denton about it?"

"That's it exactly. He and I have done one or two

deals together and, as I say, I didn't consider his private life affected business."

"He had money?" asked Roger.

"He had it and he could always get it. I told him when we would be here and suggested he should come after we had gone. We could each give it the once-over and see what we thought about it. He said that would waste time and he would enjoy seeing Provost's face when he walked in. He wanted some figures and that led me to send him the letter you saw. The only thing from me in writing."

"And if you had recaptured that," said Roger, "you could still have posed as a stranger?"

"That's it—more or less. I didn't want to mislead the inspector. I only wanted to prevent Provost and the others knowing how things stood between me and Denton."

"Why should you mind that so much?"

"They are my pals and they might think I ought to have told them about it."

"They might," agreed Roger dryly.

"But if you would not mention it," said Oxley eagerly, "they need never know. I hope my explanation will satisfy the inspector and I don't see why he should tell them."

"Will the inspector be so easily satisfied?"

"How do you mean?"

"You all told him that Denton's arrival was a surprise, and he finds that one of you knew all about it."

"I left the talking to the others."

"Perhaps, but you let him think you were all in the same boat. When he finds one of you knew Denton would be here, he may conclude you all did—especially when he discovers how well you knew him and how little you liked him. He may conclude the murder was designed by the lot of you."

"But young Cross——"

"If Cross did it, that settles it. If Cross did not, it is Beard's job to find who did."

"And he will suspect me—or us?"

"You asked for it."

"Good Lord," muttered Oxley. "It is a mess. What must we do?"

Roger answered the question with another.

"About Denton. Was the feeling Provost and the others had for him personal, or was it official?"

"How do you mean?"

"A judge reprimands a prisoner; there is nothing personal in it."

"I am afraid there was something personal in this," said Oxley. "Provost and Denton had rubbed one another up the wrong way for years. Provost, no doubt, was in the right, and it was while he was captain the thing happened they told you about. Denton just laughed and Provost said if he were a younger man he would horse-whip him; he hoped he would some day get what he deserved. But——"

Oxley stopped and stared for a moment at his questioner as though a new thought had occurred to him.

"You are not going to suggest that Provost shot him?"

"I do not think it is for me to suggest who shot him. Good-night."

Roger turned to the door, but Oxley put a hand on his arm.

"Don't tell them about me and Denton—there's a good chap. It cannot do any good and may only make trouble."

"Let us see what happens to-morrow."

Roger closed the door.

CHAPTER NINE

MISS—OR MRS.—W.

THERE was no lack of appetite at breakfast the next morning, but the conversational output was distinctly below average. Oxley, it was evident, had not told his companions of his nocturnal adventure, and Inspector Beard, if it had been reported to him, had taken no step to curtail the liberty of the man who had raided Denton's room.

The tragedy was reported in the Press, but the information given was meagre. One paper had the headline "Mysterious Death of City Man in Dorset Golf Club," and that told nearly all they knew of the affair. The victim's name and his address, a flat in Baker Street, were given; there was mention of his office in London Wall, but no reference was made to the Wandleton Park Golf Club or to his fellow-members who were at Allingham at the time. That, and no doubt very much more, would appear when the reporters got busy.

"It says," read Korwood, "the police are anxious to hear from Norman Cross, the dead man's nephew."

"Then they haven't caught him," muttered Oxley.

"I can't believe that boy did it," said Korwood.

"Why not?" grunted Bardwell.

"He seemed a decent youngster. Not the murderous type at all."

"There is no murderous type," said Bardwell.

"Any youngster, infuriated as Cross evidently was, might do just what he did."

At that they chewed their thoughts and their bacon in silence. Then Korwood began again.

"The worst of it is one murder is always followed by another."

"You mean there is a second murder to cover up the first?" said Roger. "That happens in books, but is very seldom the case in real life."

"The reason is obvious," remarked Provost the publisher, speaking for the first time. "When the interest begins to slacken the author kills off someone else to keep the fun going. Then there is a third, or an attempt at a third, and the villain gives himself away."

"Which suggests," added Roger, "that you can safely commit one murder, but as soon as it becomes a hobby you are done."

"It is more or less that way in books," nodded Provost, "but in actual fact there are barely a hundred murders in a year in the whole of England and Wales, and the majority of them present no mystery at all. They are the results of quarrels and assaults."

"Like Denton and young Cross," muttered Bardwell.

Roger wondered a little at his persistence in pinning the crime on the nephew. It was of course the obvious solution, and yet he could not help hoping it was not the correct one. The boy would soon be found and his inevitable fate if he were guilty would be such a tragic ending for a promising young life. The conversation again languished. Then Provost asked Bardwell if he was playing with Miss Venne.

"No," was the terse reply.

"You four play together," suggested Roger. "I have some things to see to and will easily get a game if I want one."

He felt more of an intruder in their little party

than he had ever done before. Their particular competition was in abeyance and they would perhaps be more at ease without him. But Oxley also cried off.

"I have some letters to write," he said. "You others make a threesome."

He glanced at Roger as he spoke. Had he been forbidden to leave the premises, or was he wishing his friends out of the way while he had his awkward little chat with Inspector Beard? Roger left without inquiry or comment.

At the club-house he found signs of newspaper activity already in evidence. Two bright young reporters were holding up Major Gwyer at the entrance.

"But, gentlemen," he was saying to them in his courteous way, "you must please remember Mr. Denton was only a visitor here, a stranger. The police will furnish you with all the information they can."

"Sure they will," said one of them scornfully.

"Someone must have known Denton pretty well," added the other.

They took a snap of Major Gwyer. It would make a good picture and might appear under the heading Interview with the Captain of the Club.

Then Roger noticed Vickie Venne. She pulled up in her little car and jumped out. The pressmen saw her too. She looked extremely attractive and might add a spot of brightness to the day's work.

"You knew Mr. Denton, miss?" inquired one of them, politely raising his hat.

"I did not," she said, and she ran to the doorway where Roger was standing.

"Not wanting a game?" he asked her, on a sudden impulse.

For a moment she hesitated. Then she shook her head.

"I came for my clubs. I am taking Winnie Gainer to Crickelford. Best to get out of this for a time."

Crickelford was another course a few miles away. It might well be more peaceful in the next few days.

Following her inside, Roger found that Inspector Beard had already arrived. He was engaged with the other four men who were said to have come in during the critical hour the previous afternoon.

He had asked them to meet him, yet his early questions seemed to lack his former keenness. If he was satisfied as to the guilt of Norman Cross, he would not expect to learn much in any other direction. But it was to be shown later that there was quite a different reason for his apparently perfunctory manner.

"I have something to show you," Roger said to him.

"All right, wait a bit."

Ferrowe, Miller, Norton and Benting were explaining that they generally played in the morning and started at the other end of the course, it being less crowded and more convenient for their homes. That day they had played in the afternoon and had ended up at the club-house.

"At what time did you finish?" asked Beard.

"I didn't notice exactly," said Ferrowe, the big man who had won prizes as Chu Chin Chow. "We started at two and generally get round in two and a half hours. But we were held up by a pair of old gentlemen who always curse four-balls, and are themselves a good deal slower."

"Then it was after four-thirty when you got in?"

"It might have been a quarter to five. What do you think?"

He appealed to his companions, who agreed as to the approximate time, but could not be more exact.

"Then you came in here for drinks?"

"I did not," said Norton. "I never do. I just washed my hands."

Roger remembered him. He was the left-handed player who had carried his clubs on his right shoulder.

"Ah—did you notice a fair-haired young fellow, age about twenty, who came in for his clubs?"

"Afraid I did not."

"I did," said Benting. He was a short man with a fresh complexion and might have hailed from the north country. "But it wasn't then."

"When was it?"

"A bit later. Might have been ten minutes afterwards, might have been twenty. I had been selecting a new club in the pro's shop and was there some time."

"Where did you see this young fellow?"

"He was running out of the club-house. Seemed in a hurry. The pocket on his bag wasn't fastened, and two balls fell out. That was why I noticed him."

"Seemed in a hurry," repeated Beard. "Excited?"

"I couldn't say as to that."

"Did he stop to recover his balls?" asked Roger. He had no business to interfere, but the question was obviously an interesting one.

"As a matter of fact," said Benting, with a grin, "he grabbed at one but the other went into a flower-bed. He said, 'Damn!' and went on without it. I found it and meant to give it to him if I saw him again."

Beard then turned to Ferrowe and Miller.

"You went into the lounge for drinks?"

"We did," said Chu Chin Chow. "One of the main purposes of golf is that you may enjoy a drink."

"Did you see Denton there?"

There was a moment of hesitation. "Well—as you might say—I did and I didn't."

"I shouldn't say anything of the sort," retorted Beard. "Either you did or you did not."

"You may see a man and yet not be quite sure who he is."

"Then you did see him? What was he doing?"

"It was like this." Ferrowe was still reluctant. "I saw him through the window as we came by, but I wasn't perfectly sure whether it was Denton or not."

"Then you knew Denton?"

"Yes . . . I knew him."

This was interesting. Here was another person to whom the murdered man was no stranger. Beard grew a little keener.

"So being in doubt you made sure?"

"On the contrary," said Ferrowe, "being in doubt, I took my drink at the bar and did not disturb him."

"You were not friends?"

"We certainly were not."

"Tell me just what you knew of him."

"Nothing good," said Ferrowe. "Some years ago I had an interest in a hardware firm in the Midlands and Denton swindled us out of a pretty big sum. When I say he swindled us, the law was on his side. He took advantage of a phrase in a contract that did not mean what it seemed to mean. We fought it out and the courts found for him. Dirty work, but there it was."

"You say that was some years ago. Did you often meet him again?"

"Never till I saw him here a day or two ago. I thought I knew him, so I nodded, and said, 'How are you?' It wasn't till afterwards that I realised

who he was. Those were the first words that ever passed between us. We had glared at one another for three days in the law courts, but had never spoken. It was no wonder his face was familiar ! ”

“ Did you speak again ? ”

“ We only made some remark about golf. I don’t even know if he remembered me. ”

“ When you saw him through the window, ” asked Roger, “ was he alive or dead ? ”

Beard glared at him for the interruption. He had of course been leading up to that. He waited for the answer.

“ It never occurred to me that he was dead. He was sitting in that corner. He might have been asleep. I looked away as soon as I saw him and, as I have told you, I kept away. ”

“ Had he a magazine in his hands ? ” Roger ventured again.

“ I think there was some sort of a paper on his knee, ” Ferrowe answered.

“ If you don’t mind, sir, I’ll ask the questions, ” said the inspector sharply to Roger.

“ Sorry. ”

“ Did you know him ? ” Beard put this question to Miller, a man a little older than his companions and not unlike George Arliss in appearance.

“ I did not know him, ” was the reply. “ I spoke to him once in the club-house, that was all. ”

“ Did you notice him on this occasion ? ”

“ I did not. ”

“ May I ask a question ? ” inquired Roger.

“ What is it ? ” snapped the inspector.

“ Were these two gentlemen together all the time in the lounge and did they leave it together ? ”

“ Meaning, ” said Ferrowe with an appreciative grin, “ do we vouch for one another, or did either of

us have a chance of putting a bullet into him on the quiet—assuming that it was quiet ? ”

“ Exactly,” nodded Roger.

“ As a matter of fact,” said Ferrowe, “ I went out to ask Norton about another game and left Miller there. So he might have done it ! When I got back he was gone.”

“ So you might have done it ! ” Roger added quickly.

“ Oh, yes,” said Ferrowe, “ we either of us might have done it if we played golf with artillery in our pockets, but we don’t.”

Beard frowned. He was not there to listen to back-chat.

“ Did you,” he demanded, “ any one of you, see a woman in the club-house at the time ? ”

He included Roger in his question, but they all replied in the negative. A few more inquiries followed, then he told them they could go.

“ You had something you wanted to see me about ? ” he added to Roger.

“ Yes. I suppose you have not yet got hold of young Cross ? ”

“ We shall soon have him. He did not return to his home.”

“ I wondered if this would help you.”

Roger produced the bridge score sheet and explained how the vital hour was divided into four parts, one of the players leaving the card-room during each period.

“ What do you get from that ? ” asked Beard.

“ Not as much as I hoped, but there is this. If for any reason you suspected any of the players, it lets Provost out.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Because Ferrowe saw Denton at about five

o'clock and Provost was back in the card-room at a quarter to five and did not go out again."

"That is all right if Denton was alive," muttered Beard. "Ferrowe didn't seem too sure of it."

"I think he would have been sure enough if he had been dead. The magazine was still in his hand or on his knee."

"Well?"

"It may let out Bardwell—Ferrowe and Miller must have been some minutes over their drink and, as they did not see Bardwell and he did not see them, he must either have gone out before they arrived or after they had left. I think the former is more likely."

"Why?"

"It fits in better with my recollection of the progress of the play. I admit it is not conclusive."

"Far from it," said Beard dryly. "What of Oxley and Korwood?"

"Have you seen Oxley?" countered Roger.

"I have," was the grim reply. "I saw him before I let him leave his room. I understand you know what happened last night?"

"I do," said Roger, "and I want to tell you why I think his story may be true."

"Well?"

"He says Denton came here by arrangement with himself because they thought of buying the place—the links, the hotel and the land adjoining."

"Well?"

"He wouldn't shoot the man with whom he was hoping to put through a big deal, would he?"

"If there was a big deal!"

"There is no doubt about that," said Roger. "I came here for the same purpose."

"Buying the place?"

"Yes. My father and I have bought a number of estates and this looked quite a promising proposition. A friend was to have come with me, but was detained. So I came alone. That there should be others on the same business is not really surprising. These things get whispered in the city, even when they are supposed not to be generally known."

"Why should Oxley have gone to Denton's room to steal his papers?"

"It was darned silly of him," said Roger, "but his story is that as his friends disliked Denton, he did not want them to know he was working with him."

"His friends disliked Denton—and they pretended they did not know him! You say your time sheet lets out Provost and possibly Bardwell, and Oxley would not attack the man with whom he was to do a big deal. That leaves Korwood. You suspect him?"

"On the contrary, I suspect Korwood least of all. Does not the steward's story acquit him?"

"Very much the reverse," said Beard. "The steward saw Korwood beside the body and Korwood slipped away, saying nothing."

"How exactly do you suppose Denton was killed?" countered Roger. "Is it not most likely that the man who fired the shot was standing outside the enclosure and put his arm over the screen? The shot was above the right ear."

"It might have been that way."

"Rolls saw Korwood inside the enclosure, on Denton's left. If you had shot a man in the way I suggest, would you walk round and stand by him? Surely you would slide off as quickly as you could."

"Not if you wished to make sure!"

"If you had any doubt, you would fire another shot from where you stood."

Beard regarded him for a moment with a tolerant smile, half-friendly, half-scornful.

"Perhaps you are one of these crime students," he said.

"The subject interests me," Roger admitted.

"Then I'll tell you this. Denton may have been dead when Ferrowe saw him. The body may have slumped afterwards and sent the paper to the floor. If so, that lets out nobody but Ferrowe."

"On the contrary," said Roger, "it would let out Oxley and Korwood."

"I won't argue about it. At the moment I am looking for a woman."

"A woman?" echoed Roger.

"In Denton's pocket I found a note signed with the initial W. Do you know any young woman hereabouts whose name starts with W?"

"A love letter?"

"Not a love letter," said Beard grimly. "Very much the reverse."

"A threat?"

The inspector did not immediately reply. It was his job to ask questions, not to answer them. But he wanted help and Bennion seemed to be a man of ideas.

"The note was very short. It said, '*I refuse utterly. I would sooner kill myself—or you.*' Signed W."

Roger whistled. That indeed gave a new turn to things. It accounted for Beard's attitude to his previous suspects and probably made him worry less about Norman Cross.

"W would of course stand for the Christian name?"

"A woman doesn't sign a note with the initial of her surname, does she?" demanded the inspector.

"Sure it was a woman?"

"It is a woman's writing," declared Beard. "I have sent it for examination."

"There are not such a lot of girls' names beginning with W," said Roger. "Winifred is perhaps the commonest; Wilhelmina, Winsome, Wanda, Wendy—I can't think of any more at the moment. But of course it might stand for a nickname. A girl might be called Woofles or Woggie or Winkie."

"But do you know of any one here with such a name?" persisted Beard.

"There is a Winifred, but I feel sure Denton never had an affair with her."

"Why not?"

"She plays golf in trousers. Much to be said for it, of course."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Denton, I believe, was a connoisseur of comely ladies. There are some to whom nature has been unduly generous in the seating region, and trousers make the fact painfully evident. Such a one is my Winifred, so I am sure she would not have appealed to him."

"Who is she?" snapped Beard. It was no time for jesting.

"Miss Winnie Gainer. You will find her address in the club book, and also the names and addresses of other lady members. Was there a post-mark on the envelope?"

"There was just a plain sheet of paper; no envelope."

"Then it may not be a local lady that you want."

"He was killed locally."

"That is true," agreed Roger. "Norman Cross is said to have threatened to kill him, and so did Miss or Mrs. W. He must have been a very unpleasant person."

CHAPTER TEN

THE POPPETTS

THERE are still some people who regret such things as Sunday newspapers. There are far more who deplore the fact that certain journals appearing on the Sabbath seem to specialise in the collection of all the most appalling stories of murder, assault, rape and burglary that have been recorded anywhere and everywhere during the preceding seven days and serve them up as a Sunday feast for those who enjoy such fare.

Each to his taste. For some the weighty exposition of political forebodings, or the heralding of the week's masterpieces of fiction. For others Crime with lurid capitals. That the latter should outnumber the former by twenty to one may be sad, but there is this to be said in extenuation. The widespread story of wrong-doing through the agency of a press that knows its public not infrequently brings to the police information they might otherwise never obtain.

Perce Poppett had few claims to be regarded as a national hero, or even as a commendable citizen. He was an odd-jobber by profession, which meant it was rather odd when he had a job and still more odd when he kept it. But that Sunday morning he lay in bed in the upper portion of his two-roomed cottage and the *News of the People* was spread in front of him. From below came the appetising odour of the pork that his wife, Mary Poppet, was roasting for his dinner.

Perce, of course, had turned first to the football results. There was always a chance that the evening papers and the wireless had been wrong and that something, however modest, might come to him from his pool coupons.

"Mary!" he had shouted.

"What is it?" she had asked, coming to the door of the room and brushing back the wisp of hair that she had not yet had time to fix properly.

"What d'you think o' this? If the Wolves 'adn't let me down by droring with the Spurs, and Aston Villa 'adn't let Everton beat 'em, I'd 'ave 'ad my four away right!"

"Go on! What about your penny points?"

"Not so good. My best was fifteen out of twenty-nine, but the know-all of the *Crier* only got eleven."

"And that means another two bob gone west," said Mary, "and my shoes wantin' mendin'."

"Must give yourself a chance. Remember the bloke wot won twelve thousand quid for a penny."

"Yes, and Jane's Robert told me if any bloke won twelve thousand quid for a penny that proves it's five million to one against you doing it."

"Why against me? Someone wins every week, don't they? May be our turn any day."

"And you spend hours every week at it, and it's always the Millwall 'Otspurs or the Clapham Rovers what let you down. I like more fun for me money. Now there's something burnin'!"

She hurried away. She was not really unsympathetic. It kept Perce happy for quite a long time filling in his coupons, and she did know a woman who had a friend who knew someone who lived in the same street as a fellow who won one of the big prizes. It's true he drank himself to death, but he needn't have.

Perce, left alone, was frowning. Not because Mary would get the names of his favourite teams wrong—he had long ago abandoned instruction on that point—but because he could not understand his lack of success. No one studied form more conscientiously than he did, and yet, out of six attempts, the best, the one that gave him his fifteen points, was the result of using a spinner that said win, lose or draw, just as chance had it. He had not told Mary that, but it was uncanny—that's what it was, uncanny.

He turned to another part of the paper and was soon engrossed in the affair of a girl and a soldier. Then on the adjacent sheet something caught his eye. It not only caught his eye, it made him stare. And he read all it said, while the ash from the cigarette on his lip dropped unheeded on the bed-clothes.

"Mary!" he shouted.

"Can't come!"

"You must come. It's important."

"Well—what is it this time?"

Her head reappeared at the door and once again she brushed back that wayward wisp.

"Who is that?"

Perce handed her the paper. He had folded it so that all she could see was the crude print of a face, and under it the words, "The Murdered Man."

"Our Mr. Drayton! Coo! Murdered! No wonder he never come last night! Who murdered 'im, Perce?"

"That shows you shouldn't jump to conclusions," said her husband. "Now read on."

As a student of serials, she obeyed. She unfolded the sheet and read aloud the headlines.

"'Mysterious affair in Dorset Golf Club. Well-known London Player Found Shot. Who Killed

Hugh Denton? 'Ugh Denton?' she gasped.
"But that's Mr. 'Arry Drayton."

"So you think," said Perce, "and so I thought. But it ain't. That is 'Ugh Denton, and 'e was found shot in what is called the nineteenth 'ole in a golf club. I thought they only 'ad eighteen 'oles, but apparently there is one more indoors. Don't follow the game meself. No art in it that I can see. Fancy watching a game where you 'ave to walk a quarter of a mile to see a fellow 'ave another 'it!"

"If that ain't our Mr. Drayton," said Mary, "where is Mr. Drayton?"

"That's arskin', that is. They say every one 'as a double. Think of it, Mary—somewhere on this earth there is folks walkin' about what is the livin' spit and image of me and you. Funny if we met 'em some day."

"Your livin' image wouldn't wear your collar an' tie, would he?"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that's our Mr. Drayton. I'd know him anywhere, and I'd know that collar and that tie. Don't you remember his tie—that one with the little 'orseshoes all over it?"

"Let's 'ave another look."

Perce studied the photograph with knitted brow.

"It's like 'im, but ties get made by the dozen."

"I knew there was something queer about him," said Mary, disregarding her husband's doubts.

"Only comes for week-ends and don't always bring the same lady—not by no means. I never 'eld with such goings-on."

"His money's good and you do well out of it."

"Maybe I do, but I never liked it. He said he was comin' this week-end. You've never known 'im miss one before without sendin' a telegram."

"P'r'aps 'e forgot."

"And all that food to waste? Not likely. That's why he didn't come." She tapped the paper, and added darkly, "It's an alibias, that's what it is."

"A nalibias—what d'yer mean?"

"That's what they call it when a man's in another place at the same time under a different name."

"You've got it muddled, me gel," said Perce.

"There ain't no such thing as a nalibias. There's a nalibi, which means when a man did something he was elsewhere at the time. And there's a nalias, which means a fellow uses someone else's name."

"Well then, which is he?"

"Which is what?"

"Did 'Arry Drayton go down there pretendin' to be 'Ugh Denton, or is he really 'Ugh Denton and was only kiddin' us that he was 'Arry Drayton?"

"He's been comin' to 'Eart's-Ease for two years off and on, 'asn't 'e?"

"What of it?"

"'Ow could 'e keep it up that long and never be discovered?"

"Why not?" demanded Mary. "If 'e wanted an 'ornt to bring 'is lady-loves to, who would know anything about it if he called himself something different?"

"Wonder if you're right?" muttered Perce.

"'Course I'm right. That's him as sure as eggs is eggs."

"P'r'aps," said Perce slowly, "if we wait and see, no one won't come no more to 'Eart's-Ease. There's things there we could do with if no one wants 'em."

"No, Perce, none o' that! You with your only child engaged to a p'liceman! I'm surprised at you! Jane and Robert'll be 'ere to supper. We'll tell them

about it, and Robert'll know what we ought to do. P'r'aps it'll be a bit of all right for 'im, too."

"And supposin' you ain't all wrong," muttered her husband. "Wouldn't the newspaper know?"

"Of course it wouldn't, silly. And—oh! that dinner'll be all spoilt."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BARDWELL AND ROLLS

Y. H. A. 25/8

AT the club-house the week-end passed quietly. The attendance of members was unusually large, and the activities both of the police and of the newspaper representatives were much in evidence, but, except for an episode that gave Roger much to think about, nothing transpired that was either startling or even worthy of record.

Both George in the hotel cocktail-bar and Rolls in the club lounge had to repeat their stories to a constantly changing audience of thrilled listeners. George's tale of the fight grew more graphic each time he told it, but the steward's account of the discovery of the body became briefer. "I saw he was dead, that is all," was his final summary.

Why the missing Norman Cross should have quarrelled with and shot his uncle no one could tell. The members decided that it was bad form on the part of both of them to stage such an affair in a place where they were only visitors.

With Roger's companions the tension had eased and they appeared, outwardly at least, to regard the game they had come there to play as of paramount importance. After some discussion they determined to resume their competition on the Monday.

For this decision Oxley was in part responsible. He told his friends that Denton's coming had been by arrangement with himself. Whether his admission was due to his innate honesty, or to a fear that, if he did not tell them, Roger or Inspector Beard might, can only be conjectured. It had the effect of clearing the atmosphere in so far as it explained the unwelcome arrival, and all agreed to carry on as before.

The news on the whole was taken very well. Provost made no comment at all. Roger felt his silence was probably his strongest form of disapprobation.

"Dirty work," said Korwood bluntly, "but you always were a tricky devil." His tone, however, was not unfriendly.

"I wish I had never suggested your coming here," muttered Bardwell gloomily. "It would have saved every one a hell of a lot of trouble."

"I didn't like the fellow any more than you did," declared Oxley, "but in big business you must go to the man who has the money."

"Are you carrying on with it?" asked Roger.

"I would if I could find any one to finance it," said Oxley. "It's a lot too much for me, but I believe it's a good thing."

"Even after the murder?" queried Korwood.

"That might help. It puts the place on the map. People will remember the name but soon forget how they came to hear it."

"Since confession is in the air," said Roger, "it is only right to tell you that I came here more or less on the same errand."

"To buy?"

Roger nodded.

Oxley stared at him. Then he seemed to see light.

"You are not by any chance related to Sir Christopher Bennion?"

"His son," said Roger.

"Oh!" Oxley distinctly wilted. He knew of Sir Christopher's deals, that sometimes ran into millions, and realised his own pigmy efforts were hardly likely to succeed against such a competitor. "Have you decided to buy?"

"Purely a matter of price," said Roger. "Of course I don't want it talked about any more than you did."

"You would not like me to come in too?" asked Oxley.

"I am afraid not. But there is nothing to prevent your getting in front of us."

It was on the Sunday afternoon that Roger heard a few words that seemed curiously significant. He had gone to the dressing-room to replace a broken shoe-lace. His locker was in a corner concealed by a double tier of other lockers that reached from floor to ceiling. There was no one about and he had been there for some moments when two people came in and started talking in subdued tones. In an ordinary way he would have made noises to announce his presence, but the first words that reached him made him pause.

"Did you tell the inspector *all* that you saw last Friday?"

Roger knew the voice, though at the moment he could not absolutely place it.

"Why not, sir?"

The reply was from Rolls, the steward. His husky tone was not to be mistaken.

"I am only wondering. You were in the bar when I came out, but you did not mention that."

"How do you know what I mentioned?"

"Naturally we talked it over with Mr. Bennion.

He was with Inspector Beard when you told them what you knew, wasn't he ? ”

That confirmed the speaker's identity ! One of four—and he knew which one.

“ I didn't see you,” wheezed Rolls. “ Mr. Bennion may have forgot what I did say.”

“ Well, never mind him. Did you see anybody or anything you have not mentioned ? ”

“ You have no right to suggest that, sir.”

“ Of course not, Rolls. Let me put it in another way. You have told your story, and you will stick to it ? ”

There was a moment of hesitation. Then the husky voice asked :

“ Are you speaking for yourself or for someone else ? ”

This time the other man hesitated.

“ We had better say it is for myself.”

“ Meaning it isn't ? ”

“ Does that matter ? ”

“ Matters a lot to me,” wheezed Rolls.

“ Why should it ? Stick to what you have said, and if twenty pounds is any use to you——”

“ Twenty pounds don't come into it.”

“ How much, then ? ”

“ Nothing, sir. Nothing at all. I take it this man Denton was about as bad as they make 'em ? ”

“ A damned sight worse. If you think you saw anything—it is easy to make mistakes—but if you keep quiet——”

“ Hush, sir. Someone is coming.”

It was Major Gwyer who walked in.

“ Hallo, Rolls. Not much doing ? ”

“ Slack now, sir. Very busy earlier on.”

“ A bit too busy, perhaps. Good-afternoon. Had a good round ? ”

Roger gathered the greeting and the question were to the other man.

"Not too bad for me."

"Mr. Webber is away, isn't he?"

This again was to Rolls.

"Yes, sir. Gone to the South of France, I believe."

"Then we shall not see him till April."

"No, sir."

"Afternoon, Gwyer!"

Someone else walked noisily in and threw his clubs in a corner as if he had no further use for them. Perhaps he had lost his match. The others moved away and Roger was glad to escape from his place of concealment.

He saw Gwyer and Rolls entering the lounge, while the third man was going out at the door.

Bertram Bardwell! He had known it, but what did it mean? Had Rolls really seen more than he had admitted? Why should Bardwell bribe him to be silent about it?

Asking himself these questions, Roger followed him to the hotel. He was seized by Korwood.

"Come on, you are just in time. We start the second round to-morrow and are going to draw for opponents."

"I hope to get Korwood," said Oxley. "An easy start."

Bardwell was with them, but he was not joining in their banter.

The little ceremony was soon over. It was Roger who drew Korwood, Oxley was against Provost and Bardwell had a bye.

"Lucky for you," grinned Oxley. "Another sweet twosome, I suppose."

Bardwell turned on his heels and left them.

CHAPTER TWELVE

KORWOOD PLAYS AND TALKS

ON the Monday morning Roger and Korwood decided to make an early start. As they approached the first tee they met Major Gwyer walking slowly from his home towards the club-house. He greeted them with his usual kindly smile.

"I hope this trouble of ours is not spoiling your fun," he said to Roger.

"Not altogether, sir ; but it is very unfortunate."

Gwyer looked a little quizzical. "I thought perhaps you would say it gave an added zest."

"Hardly that, sir."

"But are you not the Roger Bennion who was largely responsible for clearing up the mystery of the death of Professor Donachie ?"

Roger was surprised and no doubt showed it. "I had a hand in it," he admitted.

"So I thought," nodded Gwyer. "Very good work, if I may say so. A friend of mine in the War Office told me some of the issues involved that were never made public. It might have been a very terrible affair. You have had other cases as well, I believe ?"

"One or two," owned Roger.

"So I suppose we can look to you to clear this up for us ?"

Roger shook his head. "Not this time, sir. Your police will do all that is necessary."

"Perhaps you are right. Beard is a good man. I am just going to meet him. He may have news about that nephew."

Korwood had been listening with wide open eyes. As they reached the tee he tackled Roger on the matter.

"Is it true?" he asked. "You have been concerned in other murder cases?"

"Inspector Goff of Scotland Yard is a friend of mine," said Roger. "I have helped him occasionally, but you must not give me the credit that is really his."

Roger invariably minimised his own share in the mysteries he had solved and never talked much about them.

"But what did Gwyer mean about the terrible issues that were never published?"

"Just gossip," Roger told him. "We must not think of such things. Remember the importance of the game!"

For some reason no caddies were available and for the first three holes they struck grimly to their task. Korwood used one of his bisques and the score was still all square. The golf was good enough, but it may be the thoughts of both of them were on other matters.

"Having had experience of these cases," asked Korwood as they walked to the next tee, "don't you itch to get at the truth when there is a murder under your very nose?"

"Why should I if Denton deserved what he got?"

"He deserved it all right," said Korwood, "but surely you must want to know who really did it—unless you are satisfied it was the nephew?"

"The nephew is only one of the possibilities. A letter from a lady was found on the body, so she may be concerned. Or it may have been Ferrowe or Miller, or even Rolls. Then there is your little party."

"You don't really suspect one of us!" exclaimed Korwood.

"Why not? You all had the opportunity and you all admit you hated him."

"But we are not murderers!"

They both drove creditable shots down the fairway. As they followed them, Roger asked if his companion could tell him more about Denton.

"In what way?"

"There was the scandal in your club. Did the dislike for him start then or were there things before that?"

"That only brought matters to a head. He was loud and he carried on with a lot of women. He drank heavily, though he could certainly take plenty, but men don't care to see their wives drinking too much with such a fellow. He somehow egged them on. Only the silly ones of course, but there it was."

"Anything else?"

Korwood did not reply. He cut his next shot into a bunker where he spent a good deal of time and quite a lot of energy.

"Your hole," he said at last, picking up his ball.

"I warned you," laughed Roger. "We must keep our minds on the game."

"It didn't make any difference. I have never yet missed that bunker."

And, as they made for the next tee, he went on again.

"The worst thing about Denton was never proved. No one doubts it, but you can believe it or not as you like. A girl—a parson's daughter—found she was to have a baby, and as the man would not marry her she killed herself. It was known that Denton had associated with her, but that was all that could

be said. The girl never mentioned any one's name. She was too ashamed."

"What about her people?"

"She only had a father. It was almost worse for him. He resigned his living and got a job in a leper colony."

"He didn't pursue Denton?"

"That wouldn't have brought his daughter back. The old boy was broken-hearted. Even if he could have proved anything, what good would it have done? A few nasty words from the coroner, perhaps."

"Quite true," agreed Roger. "Some of the foulest crimes are those the law cannot touch. If Denton was guilty, he has only got his due. A good reason for there being no itch to catch the party who gave it him! There was no one else who was fond of the girl?"

"I never heard so."

"If there had been it might give a new motive for Denton's death."

"By jove, that's true! But it happened five years ago. No one would wait as long as that."

"You never can tell," said Roger. "According to the psychologists hate and other primitive instincts may lie dormant for years and then something may occur to make them active."

"But how could any one out of the past know Denton was coming here? It must have been young Cross."

They drove off again, but their paths diverged. Roger kept monotonously straight while Korwood indulged his taste for rambling. He got to be three down and then took a bisque to win the eighth.

"Don't you agree it must be Cross?" he asked.

"Let us forget it till we are in," said Roger.

"I can't. I am thinking of it all the time. Besides, I always talk when I am playing."

"Do you?" laughed Roger. "Then you might tell me some more about Oxley."

Two more good drives and Korwood started on the new theme.

"Oxley is a queer sort of chap. You can't help liking him. He loves hoaxing people. I ought to have suspected that egg with him about. Once he started a flag-day all on his own account and got scores of people to promise to collect for it."

"What was it for?" asked Roger.

"The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Adults."

"Afraid I never heard of it. What are its objects?"

"It bristled with them. It was to limit the number of other flag days. To punish people who allowed their children to scream to the distress of strangers. To fine dog-owners whose pets polluted public pathways. To forbid over-loud speakers and the playing of gramophones out of doors. To chase litter fiends and generally to round up those who made nuisances of themselves."

"It filled a long-felt want," said Roger. "Was it a success?"

"The police stopped it."

"Why?"

"They said he could not have a flag day for a society that did not exist."

"A pretty sound objection. What did Oxley say to that?"

"He said if the flag day was a success it would prove his society was needed and he would start it."

"A pity, perhaps, that he did not. But what is

your feeling about his bringing Denton here and not telling you others about it ? ”

There was an interruption while Korwood visited a bunker that belonged rightly to a different line of country, but with a bisque he secured another half.

“ Oxley knows all sorts of odd people,” he remarked, almost as though there had been no interruption. “ He was a solicitor but I think he found the work dull. Now he is more of a fishmonger.”

“ A fishmonger ? ”

“ Yes. Clients of his had a fine old business that came into the market owing to deaths. He formed a little company to buy it and that now supplies his needs. But he is always looking for other speculations so I am not altogether surprised at his being in with Denton.”

“ Denton had money ? ”

“ He needed it. His tastes were expensive.”

“ But there was no reason why Oxley should want to kill him ? ”

“ Quite the reverse,” said Korwood, “ if his story is true.”

At the fourteenth Roger was still two up and his opponent had only one bisque left, but the latter holed a chip shot from off the green for a win, and the position became more exciting. He used the bisque at the fifteenth and became all square.

“ Anything else I can tell you ? ” he asked.

“ Yes,” said Roger, “ but it must wait.”

The sixteenth was a short hole, a drop shot on to the green. Roger put his ball dead and got a two. Korwood took three. The seventeenth was one of the longest on the course, but Roger took a short line over a hill and was on in two.

“ Your match,” said Korwood a minute later,

gripping his hand. "A fellow who can bring off a brace of birdies at the finish like that deserves to win. What was it you wanted to ask me?"

"I hope worrying about it didn't put you off?" laughed Roger.

"Put me off! I got a three and a five. What more could I hope for? You were too good."

"What is Bardwell by profession?"

"An architect. Doing very well, I believe."

"He had no business with Denton?"

"I feel sure not. He hated him as much as we all did."

"Is he engaged to this Miss Vickie Venne?" asked Roger.

"I don't think so. He never mentioned her until we came here. He was fearfully keen on her at first, but things seem to have cooled down a bit."

"I noticed that," said Roger. Then he ventured, "I suppose Miss Venne did not know Denton?"

"Oh, no," replied Korwood. "Couldn't have."

At the eighteenth, a short hole up to the clubhouse, Korwood's luck came a bit too late. He won it in three to Roger's four.

"I wonder how Provost and Oxley are getting on?" he said. "They cannot be far behind."

"But look who is ahead!" cried Roger. "Unless I am very much mistaken that big fellow standing in the doorway with Inspector Beard is my old friend Goff of the Yard!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHIEF-INSPECTOR GOFF

"So they have called in the Yard!"

"The Yard has been busy on the case from the first. A nice murderous crew you golfers seem to be!"

"Are you taking over?"

"No. Since Denton was a London man we were asked to report on matters from our end, but it is still a local affair."

"You haven't found Norman Cross?"

"Not a trace of him. He lives in London, but in rooms, not with his uncle. He has not been seen or heard of since he left here. Of course we shall get him."

"You think he did it?"

Goff shrugged his big shoulders. "The obvious is generally true."

He and Roger were in the card-room. They had greeted one another cordially and Goff had told Inspector Beard something of Roger's aid in other cases.

"He told me one or two things that might help." The local man spoke without enthusiasm. He had little use for amateurs, though he was bound to respect the opinion of the genius from the Yard. Then a telephone call had come and Beard had gone to answer it.

"You are not staying here?" asked Roger.

"Only for a day or so. I came down to confer with the locals and to tell them what we had discovered."

"Does it amount to anything?"

"You should tell me your ideas," countered Goff. "You get the inspiration; we have to be satisfied with perspiration."

"I have not been working on it," said Roger. "I do not know what lines Beard has been following."

"You are one of them," chuckled the big man. "You were here to buy the place, so you shot the rival bidder."

"Certainly suspicious," Roger admitted. "Perhaps it is in my favour that I did not know he was a rival bidder until after his death. Also, although I do not want to spoil Beard's fun, it happens to be a fact that I did not leave this room during the fatal hour. My friends unluckily did."

"Meaning the four who came from the same club?"

"Yes."

"I was there yesterday," said Goff, "and I learned a good deal about them and also about Denton. I had a long talk with a man called McTurrock."

"Almost sounds Scottish!" Roger murmured.

"A very sound fellow. Nothing on his head—I have seldom seen anybody so bald—but plenty in it. Another man, Alleyne, seemed to know the parties too. And of course I also saw the secretary. From them I got a pretty good idea of things. Denton was unpopular, but there seemed no adequate motive for murder. Denton carried on with many women, but not apparently with their women."

"Did you discover the secret of Denton's success?"

"With the women? I did not, but I have never seen him—only a photograph."

"The big aggressive male has a fascination for a

certain type of female," said Roger. "A sort of primitive appeal, I suppose. I expect you could cultivate it, Goff."

"Thanks. I have a wife, and peace at home is the one thing I need. When you've done a good day's work it is better to put your feet up than to chase women. What was Denton like to look at?"

"Fleshy and flashy, but I don't suppose looks come into it. No one ever said that Bluebeard was particularly handsome."

"Nor was Landru," said Goff, "but where women were concerned he had a way with him."

"And away with them! When is the inquest?"

"To-morrow. That is partly why I came down. We shall probably arrange a quick adjournment."

"I suppose the bullet has been extracted?" asked Roger. "Does it suggest anything?"

"A small calibre weapon, bullet a .250. That doesn't carry us far."

"Find the weapon and you've got the man?"

"Very likely, but unless the man has another job in view he might get rid of the weapon."

"Throw it into the sea, as someone suggested? I suppose that is the safe way, but does a fellow who uses a gun part with his means of attack and defence so readily?"

"Very seldom."

"So you may catch Cross with it on him?"

"Or he may come along and say, 'Here it is,'" jeered Goff. "Useful, aren't you?"

"You have still to find Beard's Madame W. What more do you want?"

"I thought you might have some bright ideas."

"The trouble is," said Roger, "I am lacking in indignation. When some harmless person is killed

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for some sordid reason I can go all out to catch the killer. But if a really poisonous blighter gets what is due to him, it leaves me cold."

"That is where the amateur generally fails. A policeman is neither judge nor jury; he has to find rock-bottom fact. Extenuating circumstances will get every ounce that is due to them before the end is reached."

"That must comfort you a lot," retorted Roger. "Anyway, here is a suggestion. Check the story of Rolls the steward, to be sure that he has not overlooked anything."

At that moment Beard re-entered the room. He looked as though he had news, but apparently he was not divulging it while Roger was there.

"Mr. Bennion suggests Rolls may know more than he told," said Goff.

"Why do you think so?" asked Beard.

"He impressed me that way." Roger did not tell them what he had overheard; it would be better if they could get it all from the man himself.

"Would you like to see him?"

Beard put the question to his eminent colleague. As a result of the telephone talk he would have to wait for a time at the club-house, and it would be interesting to see if the great man from the Yard could extract more than he had done from the fellow who had found the body. Perhaps it would also put this Mr. Bennion in his place.

"I think I would," said Goff. He was banking on Roger's reliability.

Rolls walked in and stood as stiffly to attention as was possible for a man of his build.

"You live on the premises?" asked Goff.

"I do, sir," was the husky reply.

"Married?"

"Yes, sir. My wife does the cooking and helps me in the work."

"Where are your rooms?"

"Sitting-room behind the bar, bedrooms upstairs."

"Only the two of you?"

"That's all, sir, just now. My son—that is, my wife's son, my stepson—is often with us and helps, especially when we are busy. He has been away for ten days and has just come back."

"No one else?"

"A woman comes in the mornings to do scrubbing and that sort of thing."

"I see," said Goff. "Now think back to last Friday. You made a statement to Inspector Beard. Have you anything to add to it?"

"No, sir." The reply was wheezy as usual, but it was prompt.

"On going over everything again in your own mind there is nothing you forgot or omitted to tell him?"

"No, sir."

Goff glanced at Roger. It did not seem that his suggestion was likely to bear fruit.

"You saw Denton alive at four-thirty and found him dead at five-thirty?"

"That's right, sir."

"You mentioned certain people who came into the club-house during that hour. Who were they?"

"There was Mr. Bennion and his four friends"—Rolls glanced at Roger as he spoke—"and Mr. Ferrowe, Mr. Miller, Mr. Norton and Mr. Benting."

"You mentioned some ladies?"

"Miss Venne and Miss Gainer, but I didn't see them come into the lounge."

That, so far, repeated his former story. But Goff had not done.

"Who came in before four-thirty?"

"Before four-thirty?" repeated Rolls.

"Yes. You say you did not remain in the bar. If any one came in before four-thirty, they might have gone to wash their hands or something like that, and come back into the lounge later, mightn't they?"

"I see what you mean, sir," said Rolls.

"Well, what can you suggest?"

For some moments Rolls was thinking. Then he said:

"Four gentlemen came in a bit before Mr. Denton did. There was Captain Taylor, Colonel Pape, Mr. Monford and Mr. Scrotton."

"Have you seen them?" Goff put the question to Beard.

"No," was the rather sour reply. "This is the first time he has mentioned them."

"I wasn't asked about the people who came in earlier," said Rolls.

"Were there any others?"

"No, sir. Not that I remember. Of course there is a back entrance to the locker room and people can come and go that way."

"And the ladies can come from their quarters?" suggested Goff.

"Certainly, sir."

There was a pause. Roger was listening carefully, but he did not interrupt.

"It seems a very small number of players for a club like this," commented Goff.

"About the usual, sir, for the time of year. Most of our members play in the morning and take a nap in the afternoon. Not as young as they were. Week-ends and holiday times, with young people about, we are a lot busier."

"The people you actually saw in the lounge during

the time Denton was there were Ferrowe, Miller, Oxley and Korwood ? ”

“ That’s right, sir.”

“ No one else ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ You didn’t see Mr. Bardwell ? ” put in Roger.

“ No, sir,” replied Rolls emphatically.

“ Another thing I would like to ask,” said Roger. “ Denton told you he was waiting for someone. Was it a lady or a gentleman ? ”

“ He didn’t say, sir.”

“ Did you form any impression on the subject ? ”

Rolls hesitated. “ I thought it was a lady, sir. Now I come to think of it, I am almost sure he said ‘ her.’ ”

“ ‘ Her ? ’ ” echoed Roger. “ Can you recall his exact words ? ”

“ He had a drink and he took it into the cubby hole. ‘ I shall see her coming ’—that’s what he said, meaning he would see her through the window.”

“ Why did you not tell me all of this ? ” demanded Beard rather angrily.

“ You didn’t ask me, sir. And I didn’t remember it till Mr. Bennion put the question.”

Beard was undoubtedly annoyed. Goff had ascertained that four other men were in the clubhouse more or less at the critical time and Roger had gleaned that the person expected was a woman. Neither piece of information might be of value, but it sounded as though his own inquiries had been less searching than they should have been.

“ From the seat where the body was found,” asked Goff, “ would he have seen any one approaching ? ”

“ If they came that way, sir.”

“ Are there two ways ? ”

“ Yes, sir. Past the window or up the steps.”

"Had he seen the lady he was expecting," suggested Roger, "he would not have remained seated?"

"Perhaps not, sir," agreed Rolls, a little doubtfully.

"He was approached unawares," commented Beard. "From behind the back of the seat. There is little doubt of that." He had evidently adopted Roger's theory as to the mode of attack.

"Had he to your knowledge met any lady previously?" asked Goff.

Roger had been waiting for that question. He did not wish to put it himself.

"The only lady I ever saw him talk to was Miss Venne," said Rolls.

"And she was here at the time, but you did not see her in the lounge?"

"That is so, sir."

"Does her Christian name begin with W?" asked Beard quickly.

"I believe her Christian name is Victoria," said Roger.

"That's right, sir," nodded Rolls. "They call her Vickie."

Then their thoughts were suddenly switched into a new direction. The door opened and a young man walked in.

"I am told you want me."

The inspectors looked up, surprised at the interruption.

"This is Norman Cross, Hugh Denton's nephew," said Roger.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE NEPHEW'S STORY

"You are Norman Cross?"

"I am."

"Hugh Denton was your uncle?"

"He was."

Inspector Beard put the questions to confirm the information given them by Roger Bennion. Then there was a pause.

The unannounced return of the man for whom the police of the whole kingdom were searching was almost disconcerting. He stood before them, slightly flushed, somewhat defiant. His long fair hair was blown about as though he had been driving without a cap. His blue eyes looked honest, but he had a weak, sulky mouth.

It is no new thing for an escaped wrong-doer to give himself up to justice, and perhaps the momentary pause was due to a doubt as to whether the necessary questioning should be done by the local officer, who had sent out the request for his detention, or by the superior officer from Scotland Yard. Goff apparently interpreted it that way.

"Your case," he said laconically.

"You won't be wanting me?" wheezed Rolls.

"Not for the present," said Beard.

There was another pause while the steward waddled to the door. Then Beard began. His assistant, who had duly noted what Rolls had told them, was waiting with book open and pencil poised.

"Why did you run away?"

The question was shot at young Cross and the answer was prompt.

"Because I did not want to stop."

"Did you go before or after your uncle was killed?"

"How can I tell?"

Beard regarded him steadily for a moment. Then he used his most impressive tone.

"Cross, you are not bound to say anything to incriminate yourself, but if you can give a clear account of what you did it will save a lot of trouble."

Roger expected him to use the formula as to his words being taken down, possibly to be used in evidence. But apparently he did not think the moment for that had arrived.

"What do you want to know?" asked the young man.

"You came here with your uncle for a few days' holiday?"

"I did."

"You were on good terms with him?"

"I was then—in a way."

"But last Friday afternoon you quarrelled?"

"We did."

"You struck him and you said you would like to kill him?"

"I struck him. I—I don't know what I said."

"If a witness testifies that you were heard to say that you would like to kill him—would it be true?"

"I don't know what I said," was again the dogged reply. "If you think I killed him, you are wrong."

"Why did you come back here?"

"I saw in the paper yesterday what had happened and that I was wanted."

Another tribute to the Sunday Press. Both Roger and Goff were waiting for a more important question.

"Where were you yesterday?"

"I do not see that that matters."

Another pause. Then came the inquiry they were expecting.

"Why did you quarrel with your uncle?"

"It was something private. It only concerned us."

"It concerns me," said Beard gravely. "You quarrelled with him, you struck him and, if what we are told is true, you threatened to kill him. You went away and he was found dead. If you had nothing to do with his death, you would be wise to tell me the whole story."

"It doesn't concern you or anybody else."

Young Cross looked sulkily obstinate. His hand trembled as he took a cigarette from his case and lit it.

"You refuse to tell me the nature of the quarrel?"

"I do."

"Very well. Then I warn you that you may be charged with his murder and anything you say may be used as evidence."

"I didn't do it. You have no right to say that I did."

"Do you care to tell me what you did after the quarrel?"

"I—I went to my room and packed up and went away."

"We are told the quarrel was at about half-past three. What time was it when you left?"

"I don't know."

"You paid your bill?"

"I did."

"If we are told that was at five o'clock—would it be correct?"

"It might be."

"Then what were you doing between half-past three and five?"

"A lot of things."

"Your uncle was killed between four-thirty and five-thirty. If you can tell me just what you were doing it may help."

There was a long pause. The mutinous obstinate expression was very marked, but then the youngster seemed to realize the reasonableness of the suggestion.

"I went to my room, and started to write a letter. I don't know how long it took. Then I tore it up and decided to go away instead."

"Did you go to the club-house?"

"My clubs were in the rack in the locker-room. I had to get them."

"Did you go into the lounge?"

"No. Why should I?"

Beard did not answer his question, but put another.

"Did you meet any one on the steps, in the lobby, or in the locker-room?"

"I may have done. I don't know. I didn't notice."

"Did you notice anything out of the ordinary in the locker-room?"

"How do you mean? I don't think so."

"Workmen, for instance?"

"I didn't notice."

If that was true, thought Roger, if he had got his clubs unaware of the din made by the carpenters, it was remarkable evidence of his state of agitation at the time. But it did not show the cause of the agitation.

"You put your clubs in your car and drove away?"

"Yes."

"It is your car—not your uncle's?"

"It is my car."

"You were not dependent on your uncle?"

"No. He let me have the money, but it is my money. I shall be twenty-one next month."

"Yet you could not wait till then — you quarrelled?"

"That had nothing to do with it."

Again the mouth shut obstinately and the angry look came into the eyes.

"Is there anything else you can tell me?"

"No."

Goff had been listening and watching very carefully. When he spoke it was in the fatherly way that he knew so well how to assume when it suited his purpose.

"Now, young man," he said, "let me tell you something. You have a secret you don't want the world to know. I don't blame you for that. But are you adopting the best way to keep it secret?"

Cross stared suspiciously at him. "What do you mean?"

"You are putting yourself up against the police. What happens? We set a few men to inquire into your affairs. They see your friends and your associates, and believe me, there is not much they do not get to know about you. What happens next? You are put in the witness-box at the inquest and you are questioned on oath. You are asked things you cannot deny—things you never imagined we should discover. Perhaps the newspapers see a story in it. They make the most of it—you know that. But if you volunteer the story to us and we are satisfied about it, that may end it."

Cross's expression changed. The obstinate look gave way to one of hope.

"You mean, if I tell you, no one else will know about it?"

"I mean if you tell us the whole story, and it does not affect the question of who killed your uncle, we shall leave it at that. You agree, Inspector Beard?"

"Certainly," said the local man.

Cross looked from one of them to the other. He was only a boy and Goff's kindly manner was very effective. Bullying would have got nowhere with him. He would have grown more silent and sullen. Now he decided to speak.

"My uncle was a devil. I know he is dead, but I am glad of it. He stole my girl from me."

"How did he do that?" asked Goff gently.

"I met her. She was wonderful. She loved me and I loved her. We arranged to be married in the New Year. I introduced her to Uncle Hugh. He pretended to be fearfully pleased about it. He gave us a glorious time. When I was at work he took her about himself. He told me he wanted to get to know her better, as she would be almost a daughter to him. I was utterly taken in. All the time he was planning to rob me of her."

The boy spoke in short angry sentences and at times his emotions threatened to get the better of him. Yet it was a relief to speak. No doubt it was the first love of his life and his pride had been rolled in the mire.

"You discovered this while you were here?" suggested Goff.

"She wrote me a letter. She thought I already knew."

"Have you got the letter?"

"I lost it. But I remember it well enough." This was muttered very bitterly. "She said Uncle Hugh

would have told me about it. She hoped I would not be too hurt, but they found they loved one another. I was too young to marry, but there was no reason why we should not always be great friends."

"Your uncle had not told you?"

"No! The dirty coward left that to her!"

"What did you do?" inquired Goff.

"The moment I got the letter I took it to him and asked if it was true. He said it was. He treated it almost as a joke. He said I should soon get over it. A fellow was a fool if he married at my age and before long I should be grateful to him. He said he meant to marry her almost immediately."

"He meant to marry her?" echoed Roger.

"Yes! The cheat! The swine! I said he shouldn't do it. I felt then that I could have killed him. He sneered at me and I hit him in the mouth. . . . But he is bigger than I am. . . ."

He stopped, unable to go on. His story tallied very closely with that of George, the cocktail expert, who had witnessed the scene. His uncle had knocked him down. He could not be expected to recount the shame of that.

"So you went to your room?" said Goff.

"Yes. I started a letter to her. I told her I would never allow it. He was old enough to be her father and wasn't fit to marry any decent girl. But I couldn't say it as I wanted to. A letter was no good. I must see her."

"Did you see her?"

"No. She was staying with friends in North Wales. I packed my bag and got the car. I spent a night on the road and it was late on Saturday when I arrived. I meant to see her the next day. But in the morning I read in the paper what had happened. At first I still meant to see her. Then I thought I

had better come back. They couldn't marry now and I—I wanted time to think about it."

"You came back in your car?" asked Beard.

"No. There was engine trouble. I left the car and borrowed a motor-bike."

That helped to account for his undisturbed travels. On the whole it was a clear story and Roger felt sorry for the boy. He, for one, believed him. Whether the girl's enchantment was broken only time would show.

"You swear," said Goff, "that after the quarrel with your uncle you never saw him again?"

"I swear it absolutely."

"You swear you did not shoot him?"

"How could I? I had nothing to shoot him with!"

"What is the girl's name?"

At this Cross hesitated.

"Must I say? I don't want to drag her into it."

"We may have to verify the story and if she thought she was to marry him, she is already concerned in it."

"She is Wanda Moffatt."

"Begins with W!" ejaculated Beard.

Young Cross took no notice of so obvious a remark, not knowing what prompted it. Goff obtained the girl's address.

"You promised this should not be published."

"If your story is true," said the Yard man, "there is no reason why it should be. You may be wanted to-morrow to give evidence of identification. We shall also want you to sign the statement about your quarrel, but you will not be questioned upon it. If we find any respect in which you have not told us the truth, that will be another matter."

"It is all true," muttered Cross.

"I am sorry you lost Miss Moffatt's letter. What do you think happened to it?"

"I don't know. I showed it to him, but he didn't take it; at least, I don't think so. He didn't read it. When I got upstairs I could not find it."

Then there was a tap at the door and a thin face showed itself. It belonged to a tall, dark, young man. He addressed Inspector Beard.

"There are some people of the name of Poppett who say they have to see you."

"That's right," said Beard. "Who are you?"

"I'm Jim Weston, sir. Mrs. Rolls's son. Rolls asked me to tell you."

"All right. Tell the Poppetts we'll see them in a minute or two."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE POPPETTS RECOGNISE A FRIEND

"WELL, what have you to say?"

The scene was the same, but in place of young Norman Cross the inspectors were faced by Perce and Mary Poppett. Roger Bennion was still with them.

"What do you think of that?" Goff had asked Roger when the dead man's nephew left them.

"It sounds true to me," said Roger. "That youngster brought his girl to see his uncle. We don't know what sort of a girl she is, but we do know something of the uncle. He would start in the fond-father style and would gradually cut the boy out altogether. Denton knew all the moves in the game; the girl would hardly have a chance. I wonder if he really meant to marry her."

"Quite likely," said Goff, cynically. "That sort of fellow does in the end. Has his fling—a pretty long one—and then settles down with a fluffy bit, young enough to be his daughter."

"And it gives Cross about as hot a motive as you could ask for," commented Beard.

"It does," agreed Roger. "I can imagine his feeling murder in his heart when he got the girl's letter and when his uncle jeered at him. But, as he himself put it, he had nothing to shoot with."

"Denton may have had."

"But had he?"

Beard admitted that so far there was no evidence of such a thing.

"What about these people who want to see you?" asked Goff. "Poppetts, wasn't it?"

"I was going to tell you of them before young Cross blew in," said Beard. "A story of mistaken identity, or something of the sort. Nothing in it, I expect; but we'd better get it over."

So Perce and Mary appeared. Perce had on his Sunday suit and carried a billycock hat in his hand. Mary wore a bright-blue frock and a hat with a big green bow.

"Well, what have you to say?"

Beard's tone was crisp. Perce stepped forward and produced a page of the previous Sunday's newspaper. He took it out of his hat, almost with the air of a conjurer producing a rabbit.

"It's about this 'ere," he began, pointing to Hugh Denton's picture.

"Well?"

"What about this?"

He produced a mounted photograph obviously of the same man and printed from the same plate. It also came out of his hat. It was no trick, but it was very effective.

"That ain't Hugh Denton," he added, pointing to the second exhibit. "It is 'Arry Drayton."

"Where did you get it?" asked Beard.

"From Mr. Drayton's own sittin'-room."

"That is the name you knew him by?" Obviously there was more in it than he had supposed. "Tell us about it."

Perce was very willing to oblige.

"Yesterday mornin' as I was lookin' at me paper I sees that picture. 'Mary,' I says to Mrs. Poppett, 'who is this?' 'Mr. Drayton,' she says quick; 'im wot I does for at the week-ends at 'Eart's-Ease.' 'You're wrong,' I says. 'It's Mr. Denton wot's been

killed down in Dorset.' 'E may be Mr. Denton down in Dorset,' she says, 'but 'e's Mr. Drayton 'ere. And if 'e's been killed that's why 'e never come for the week-end like wot 'e said 'e would.' "

He had to tell his story in his own way, but Beard thought he might get on more quickly with Mrs. Poppett.

"How long have you known him?" he asked.

"Two years, sir," said Mary, "or really a little more. I knew it was him by the 'orse-shoes on 'is tie."

"And where do you say he lived?"

"I dunno where he lived, sir. I mean ordinary times, I don't. But, at the week-ends he come to 'Eart's-Ease which is a bungalow by the river near by Bussingford where me and Mr. Poppett lives. Ivy Cottage is our 'ouse."

"But where did he write from to give you instructions? Or where could you write to him, if you wanted to?"

"Nowheres, sir. He used to say he'd be down again next Saturday or Sunday as the case might be. Or he'd send a telegram."

"Rather mysterious? Weren't you curious about it?"

"Mrs. Poppett ain't curious," said Perce, who thought he had been silent long enough. "Mr. Drayton paid like a gent and were entitled to be so treated."

"You were expecting him this last week-end?" inquired Roger.

"We was."

"Alone?"

"He never come alone," said Mrs. Poppett.

"Brought his wife?" suggested Roger.

"Or his wives," amended Perce.

"You mean," said Beard, "he brought different women from time to time."

"I do." Perce had not read his Sunday papers in vain. "An abode of love, that's what it was."

"You saw these various women?"

"Can't say I actually saw 'em, but——"

"Did you?"

This was to Mrs. Poppett, who nodded her head vigorously.

"Don't know as I see all of 'em, but I see a good many. Girls can change the colour of their hair from brown to gold and from gold to carrots, but they can't change the size of their feet, can they? They can't wear threes one week and fives the next."

"Could you recognise any of these women if you saw them again?"

"I certainly could," said Mary.

"So could I," added Perce. "I never went to the 'ouse, but I see 'em more than once on the river."

"That might be useful," said Beard. Roger could see the thought that was in his mind. If his nephew's fiancée, Wanda Moffatt, had been his companion for one of those week-ends it would provide young Cross with a stronger motive than the alleged letter that had so curiously disappeared.

"You never heard or witnessed anything of the nature of a quarrel at this bungalow?" asked Goff, who wanted to get on.

"No, sir," said Mary.

"What exactly were your duties?"

"Well, sir, s'posing he was coming on the Saturday I'd leave the beds ready——"

"One bedroom or two?"

"One, sir. There was another but no one ever used it that I knows of. And I'd lay the table and leave some milk and coffee ready to be heated. He always

used to bring an 'amper, chickens and tongue and 'am and all sorts——"

"Not forgettin' champagne," added Perce.

"Then I come again in the mornin' and cleaned up and set the breakfast."

"And polished the shoes?" asked Roger.

"That's right, sir, *and* they were different sizes. One lady had very small feet. She come pretty often, but some was bigger. Occasionally I met 'em going to the bathroom or downstairs. But it weren't no business of mine."

"Then you left?" queried Goff.

"Yes, sir. After breakfast they was away all day, in the car or on the boat. Either they took lunch with 'em or got it somewheres. Then I made the beds and left everything the same as the night before."

"You were expecting Mr. Drayton this week-end and he didn't come, is that it?"

"Yes, sir. I went up to get the breakfast and I found there weren't no sign of him. Everything was just as I left it the night before. I come back and told Poppett. 'Changed his mind, he had, that's all. P'r'aps the lady let him down.' That's what Poppett said, but when he showed me the piece in the paper I knew better."

"What did you do?" asked Goff.

"It's like this, sir," cut in Perce. "Our Jane, which is a domesticated servant, and a very good one, if it is me that says it; she is walkin' out with a bobby—beggin' your pardon, a p'liceman. Though he is a bobby seein' as his name is Robert. Robert Gay, or Gay Robert as we call 'im on account of 'is being remarkable solemn—not but what 'e ain't a good feller and as steady as they make 'em."

It was as well to put in a good word for Robert, and should do no harm for these men to realise that

they were talking to the prospective father-in-law of a police constable.

"Jane and 'im was coming to supper so we waits till then and tells 'im about it. At first he thought it was all a mistake. 'It ain't no mistake,' Ma says—meanin' Mrs. Poppett. 'There's a copy of that same photograph on the table at 'Eart's-Ease. 'Ow could that get there if Mr. Denton and Mr. Drayton weren't one and the same person?' "

"That's right," confirmed Mary. "That's what I told him."

"'E said he'd like to see it," continued Perce. "So we took 'im round and there it was. 'Leave it in my 'ands,' he said. Which we done. 'E reported to 'is super and so, to cut a long story short, 'ere we are."

The two inspectors looked at one another. The story, backed with the photographs, was fairly conclusive. It was also quite in character with what they had heard of Hugh Denton's mode of life. It might provide a new motive for his death, though at the moment there was no connecting link between his doings at Heart's-Ease and his fate in Dorset.

"There is no question that Denton is his real name?" queried Beard.

"None, I should say," replied Goff. "His home, his business, his clubs, his bank all know him as Hugh Denton."

"So does his nephew," added Roger.

"There is little doubt," Goff went on, "if these people are right, the Drayton name—same initials by the way: H.D.—was just a cover for these irregularities."

"What should we do about it?" asked Beard.

For reply Goff turned to Poppett.

"You have seen Drayton, as you call him, and can identify him?"

"Certainly."

"Then you and your wife had better see the body. If you are both still convinced it is that of the man you knew as Drayton we shall want you to give evidence to that effect to-morrow."

"But it won't alter the fact that he is Denton," observed Beard.

"No, but it will publish the fact of the double identity and you cannot tell where that will lead."

They were to get a lead sooner than they expected. Perce and Mary were quite willing to play their parts. Perhaps the startling story they were to unfold might even put their pictures in the papers.

"Two o'clock!" muttered Roger. "What about some lunch?"

He had finished his round with Korwood very early and on meeting Goff and joining in his inquiries had lost all thought of time. As Beard got up to arrange for Perce and Mary to make their gruesome inspection—they were to have lunch first—Roger and Goff rose too. They all moved out together.

In the lobby they met two girls coming in, to prepare for an afternoon round. Mary nudged Perce.

"Good-morning, miss," she said to the taller of the two.

The girl stared at her. All the colour drained from her face. She turned away and hurried through the door to the women's section of the club-house.

"Don't know me, I s'pose," sniffed Mary, "or don't want to. That's one of 'em."

"One of whom?" asked Beard.

"One of the ladies—if you call 'em that—wot stayed with Mr. Drayton at 'Eart's-Ease."

"You are quite sure?" asked the inspector.

" 'Course she is," said Perce. " So am I. That's one of the ones I see myself."

" What is her name ? "

Mary shook her head. " I were never told no names."

" Her name," said Roger, " is Miss Victoria Venne. She lives down here, near the links."

" Does she ? " said Beard. " Then perhaps she has something to tell us ! "

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

VICKIE VENNE'S DENIALS

LUNCH must wait. The two inspectors and Roger returned to the card-room and Perce and Mary were still with them. Miss Vickie Venne had been asked to come, and an officer was waiting to see that she did not fail to do so.

She entered, holding herself very erect. Outwardly she was perfectly composed, but her firm mouth was tightly set and her strongly marked brows had almost a frown.

" You carry on," said Goff to Beard in an undertone.

" Please sit down." The local man spoke very politely. " I believe your name is Miss Victoria Venne and you live in this neighbourhood ? "

" That is right," said Vickie, taking the seat at the end of the table ; really a row of three card-tables put together. She had a low, pleasing voice, and her eyes met his quite steadily.

" Have you met these people before—or either of them ? "

He indicated Mr. and Mrs. Poppett. The girl stared at them with no expression on her face.

"No," she said coolly. "Who are they?"

"Why, miss——" began Mary indignantly, but Beard motioned her to be silent.

"Did you ever visit a bungalow called Heart's-Ease, close to the village of Bussingford, on the Thames?"

"Never," said Vickie firmly.

"Did you know a man who called himself Harry Drayton?"

"I did not."

"Did you know Hugh Denton, who was shot here last Friday?"

"No. He spoke to me in the lounge, but it was a casual remark about the course, such as one might make to a stranger."

That was not true. Roger knew it. But he did not interrupt.

"You had nothing more to do with him?"

"Nothing."

"Were you here last Friday?"

"I was."

"Can you tell me at what time?"

"I arrived at this time, or a little later, to play a round with my friend, Miss Gainer."

"And after the round you came back?"

"I did."

"At what time was that?"

"I do not know exactly. It was probably about five o'clock."

"What did you do?"

"I went to the ladies' dressing-room and put away my clubs and changed my shoes. Then I went home."

"Did you enter the lounge?"

"I did not."

"Did you see Mr. Denton?"

"I did not."

"Had you any appointment to meet him?"

"Certainly not."

She had given her answers in a calm level tone and for a moment it appeared that Inspector Beard had no more to ask her. Roger, however, ventured a question.

"When you were playing on Friday you probably saw another match, a four-ball, with Mr. Ferrowe and Mr. Miller?"

"I did."

"Were you in front of them or behind?"

"We were immediately behind them. They held us up, as they generally do."

"So you would have followed them into the clubhouse?"

"Presumably."

Inspector Beard then turned to Mary Poppett.

"You have heard what Miss Venne says. Do you still believe that she was one of Mr. Drayton's visitors at Heart's-Ease?"

"Sure of it, sir," said Mary, her eyes fixed on Vickie, "if it is my very last word."

"You could not be mistaken?"

"No, sir. 'Specially not now I've heard her talk. She ain't the sort you mistake. She was pleasanter than most and she give me half a crown, which very few of 'em did."

Vickie met her gaze unflinchingly and shook her head. She said nothing.

"Do you recognise her?" This was to Perce.

"I do," he declared. "I see her in the boat with Mr. Drayton. 'Better looking than some of 'em,' I said to Mrs. Poppett; 'but 'e does know 'ow to

pick 'em." Those was my very words. And later on Mrs. Poppett told me about the 'arf-crown."

"When might all this have happened?" There was an inflection of scorn in Vickie's tone as she put her question.

"Well, now," said Perce. "I don't keep no di'ry. It was a good time back, more 'n a year ago."

"That's right," nodded Mary. "The summer before last. Might have been June. I don't wish no 'arm to any one, but true is true."

"What have you to say to this?" Beard addressed Vickie rather more sternly.

"These good people are evidently labouring under some misapprehension," she replied, as coolly as before. "If they could fix a precise date I might be able to tell you where I was at the time. They must be mistaking me for someone else."

There was a pause. Her steady denials were not without effect. Perce looked a shade less confident, but Mary was still obstinately certain. Goff seemed dubious, and Beard apparently felt the matter could not at the moment be carried much farther.

Roger was arguing with himself. Prejudice must not outweigh justice. Denial of a truth—if it be a truth—can cause delay, but in the long run it seldom foils the searches of the police.

"I think the matter could be settled," he said, "if Miss Venne would write down a few words for you."

They all looked at him; and then at her.

"Why should I?" said Vickie.

"Why shouldn't you?" said Roger.

"Very well. I will."

A sheet of paper and a pen were put in front of her.

"Well?" She gave him a derisive smile.

"Please write——"

He paused and she took up the pen.

"I refuse utterly."

She wrote the words. He had to speak from memory.

"I would sooner——"

That also she wrote.

"Kill myself—or you."

The pen dropped on the table.

"Please sign it with your initials, V.V."

The pen remained on the table. She stared at him. All the colour had left her cheeks.

"What does it mean?" she whispered.

The next move was with Beard. He was no fool. He recognised the words and he realised at once that what looked to be a W might in fact be V.V. The original note found on Hugh Denton had been returned to him. He took it from his pocket and, as he did so, Goff bent forward and handed him the sheet of paper on which Vickie had already inscribed the first few words.

The handwriting, rather square in character, was very distinctive. No one could doubt that in both cases it was the same.

"You can go," said Beard to Perce and Mary. *"Sergeant Evans will give you some lunch and then take you to the mortuary. He will arrange with you about to-morrow."*

Rather reluctantly Mr. and Mrs. Poppett departed. They were being bundled out just as something exciting was to happen. But they had to obey, and lunch was a pleasant word.

"Now, Miss Venne," said Beard, when they had gone, *"would it not be better if you told us the truth? The words you started to write were found on a note in Denton's pocket after his death. They were signed with your initials and the writing is*

identical with what you have just written. I am not accusing you of anything ; I am asking for an explanation."

"You are not bound to reply," Goff added, "but there is the note and you heard what the Poppetts have to say. They will repeat their story in court, and the note will be produced. Then you will be questioned. That is, of course, unless you can satisfy us now that there is no reason for us to carry the matter further. We cannot promise anything, but you may be quite sure that your best chance of keeping things from public discussion is to be frank with us."

Vickie was silent. Roger felt sorry for her. She had flashed a look of scorn, almost of hate, at him. He knew what it meant. Faced by enemies, the one she had thought to be a friend was the very one to entrap her. She could not have forgotten her note to Denton, but she had probably assumed it was destroyed and her rigid denials of the Poppetts' story would be effective. It was a thing any girl would deny, but now—what was the use of persisting?

"Those people told you the truth," she said at last, in a low strained tone. "I did know Hugh Denton and I did stay with him at Heart's-Ease. Twice. I did not know he called himself Drayton. But I did send him that letter. He was utterly, detestably, unbelievably vile."

None of the men spoke. After a moment she added:

"I did not kill him, but I am glad he was killed. If ever a man deserved it, he did."

"We want to know all we can about him," said Goff. "Suppose you begin at the beginning."

She looked from one of them to the other. Her tale was difficult, but she seemed to make up her mind

that she must go through with it. Her manner changed. She was more composed—in a way, more impersonal. Her tone had a tinge of bitterness, but she spoke almost as though she were dealing with someone other than herself.

"I will not pose as an innocent ignorant girl, deceived by a bad man, but I did not realise that he was just a lustful beast."

"You must be nearing thirty," murmured Goff in an undertone.

"Someone once said the five most difficult years in a woman's life were between twenty-five and thirty," she retorted. "I am twenty-eight."

"I reckoned it was about that," nodded Goff.

"You mean I was old enough to know something of life. That is true. And I was a nurse. I had been through the hospital training and was taking private cases. There is not much that a nurse does not know of human nature. I met Hugh Denton. He was a good deal older than I was, but there was something fascinating, something dominating about him that was new to me. I thought he wanted to marry me, but I did not know that I wanted to marry him."

She hesitated a moment and then went on again more quickly.

"My thoughts and emotions will not interest you. I yielded to his persuasions and went to Heart's-Ease. You may take it, if you like, that I was as much to blame as he. I went with my eyes open—but there was one thing they were not open to. I believed at that time I was the only woman in his life. I found I was wrong. I was one of many. One bead on the devil's rosary of his devotions! When I discovered that, I ended with him at once and—as I thought—for ever."

"That was in June last year?"

"May or June. Nearly eighteen months ago. When my mother died I came home here to be with my father. Then last week, to my surprise and horror, Hugh Denton appeared. He asked—he demanded——"

She stopped. Control became more difficult. But she forced herself to continue.

"He said he had always loved me and he desired to resume our intimacy."

"You refused?" murmured Goff.

"I refused and he threatened that unless I yielded he would tell my friends what had happened before."

"Your friends or your father?"

"My—my friends."

"You mean one particular friend?"

"It is not necessary to go into that," she said sharply. "I refused. I sent him the note you have there. That is why I wrote it. You were entitled to ask and I have told you. There is nothing more to be said."

"On the contrary," declared Inspector Beard in his brusquer manner, "there is a good deal more to be said. You refused and he may have carried out his threat. Your friend may have shot him."

"My friend did not!" she cried almost fiercely.

"Who is your friend?"

"That does not concern you. I have told you all I know and there is no need to bring any one else into it."

She spoke with spirit, but such a reply was hardly likely to satisfy Inspector Beard.

"Did Denton know him?"

"No!"

"Then how could he have threatened to tell him?"
There was no answer. She was driven into a corner,

and she knew it. Her hands were clenched and her mouth closely shut.

"Miss Venne, is it worth while? I know the man and, believe me, the inspectors will soon find out who he is."

It was Roger who spoke. He tried to put all the kindness he could into his words. Vickie turned on him, her eyes blazing with anger.

"You mean if I do not tell them—you will! You are a friend to be proud of!"

"Sometimes the truer the friend the less pleasant his advice."

"Spare me the platitudes, please!" She turned from him to Beard. "My friend is Mr. Bardwell."

"Bardwell—Bertram Bardwell. One of the four from his own club?"

She nodded.

"And you said Bardwell and Denton did not know one another?"

"That is true. They never even spoke."

"Then Denton must have known how things were between you and Bardwell," said Goff shrewdly.

"Are you and Bardwell engaged to be married?"

"We are not."

"You expect to be?"

Vickie did not reply. Again Roger felt sorry for her. It was not easy to face the questions of those two men. They did not bully, but they were tenacious.

"Now, miss," continued Goff, "please help us to get it clear. When Denton threatened to tell your friend, Mr. Bardwell, of your old association unless you renewed it—what did you do?"

She made no answer.

"You did not renew it?"

"I certainly did not!" she flashed.

"And you decided Mr. Bardwell had better hear about it first from you? That was natural."

It was a shrewd guess. Vickie did not attempt to deny it.

"I always meant to tell him," she said in a more subdued tone. "I had done with Hugh Denton before I ever met Mr. Bardwell."

"I quite understand. When exactly did you tell Mr. Bardwell?"

Vickie hesitated. She would have liked to refuse to reply, but it seemed hopeless. Bit by bit they had dragged the whole story from her.

"On Thursday night, last week."

"The night before Denton was killed?"

She did not answer. Roger remembered that night. Bardwell had returned earlier than his friends expected and he had resented Oxley's chaff. There had been a change in his manner from that time. They had attributed it to a tiff with Vickie. The truth was apparently more serious.

"How did Mr. Bardwell take what you told him?" Goff was asking.

She looked at him for quite a time without replying. Her courage and control were remarkable. Many girls would have become hysterical at such questioning.

"How would you take it if the woman you thought of marrying told you a thing like that?"

Goff might have retorted that it was his job to ask questions as to facts, not to reply to fancies. But he did not. He seemed to consider the problem very carefully.

"I think," he said slowly, and looking very hard at her, "there are three things I might do. The first would be to tell the woman I was through with her—which might leave her so angry with the man who

wrecked her happiness that she might even be ready to kill him. The second would be to say the past was past and we would forget it. The third would be to feel such fury against the other man that I might myself wish to kill him. *Which way was it with Bardwell?* "

Roger had never before heard Goff make such a speech. He was a clever fellow. He could suit his style exactly to the party with whom he was dealing. A tense silence followed his words. Beard moved his chair an inch and the noise seemed startling.

"Mr. Bardwell left me," said Vickie at last, "and I have not seen or spoken to him since. I did not shoot Hugh Denton, and if you imagine he did, you are utterly and entirely wrong."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he could not do such a thing. Because however much he might have cared for me, and however angry what I said might have made him, he is incapable of crime of any sort."

The inspectors, cynical from experience, exchanged glances. No woman believes evil of the man she loves. The next word was with Roger.

"One of Inspector Goff's suggestions," he observed, "was that a man in such circumstances might say the past is past; we look to the future. If Bardwell had taken that line would you have married him?"

"I would," she said slowly and clearly.

"Have you a gun?" Beard's question cut sharply into the theorising talk.

"I have not."

"Ever had one?"

"Never."

"Huh. We must see Bardwell."

Beard seemed to think that ended the matter, but Goff had one more inquiry to make.

" You say you wrote that note because Denton was urging you to renew your friendship with him ? "

" Why else should I have written it ? "

" It was a threat to kill him ? "

" Or myself. I wanted to put it as strongly as I could."

" You meant it—you would kill yourself ? "

" I was desperately unhappy. I thought he was ruining my life."

" If I tell you that according to another story we have heard, Denton had just become engaged to marry someone else, would that in any way affect what you have said ? "

" Why should it ? " she replied. " I knew Hugh Denton ; you did not."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE MISSING LETTER

LUNCH at last ! They decided to have something in the club-house and were invited to help themselves from an excellent ham. Large tankards of beer were equally welcome.

Roger noticed that Jim Weston was attending to their wants. He wondered if Rolls was purposely keeping out of their way lest any more questions should be put to him.

"Do you often help here ? " he asked the stepson.

"I do what I can, sir," the young man answered pleasantly. "Rolls isn't as nimble as he was, and my mother likes me to give him a hand."

"What is your own job ? "

"A steward, sir ; on one of those luxury liners, as they call them. The *Atalanta Star*."

"You were away last week ? "

"Yes, sir. In London. I hoped to sign on again with the old ship, but they are trying to do with fewer hands."

"Hard work, isn't it ? "

"Don't mind that, sir."

"Quite right. We'll let you know if we want anything else."

"Thank you, sir."

For some minutes the three men ate in silence. Goff, feeling a little refreshed, was the first to speak.

"You are very quiet, Mr. Bennion."

"Not presuming to disturb the thoughts of experts," said Roger.

"Not usually so shy, are you? Perhaps you have been doing a bit of thinking yourself?"

"Quite a lot."

"One wants to sort things out a bit," commented Inspector Beard. "When you get three stories on top of one another, all pointing different ways, it is rather puzzling."

"Seems to me they all point the same way," said Roger.

"How's that, sir?" Beard ^{Munshi} was more respectful since he had seen Goff's attitude to the amateur.

"They all show that Denton deserved killing and that it might have saved a lot of women a deal of trouble if it had been done sooner."

"That's as it may be," said Beard. "Our job is to find the killer."

"But you cannot expect any one to be particularly sorry if you fail."

"Come, Mr. Bennion," protested Goff, only half-seriously, "we look to you to help us. You must have some ideas on the subject."

"I have."

"We are listening."

"We now know," said Roger, "the sort of man Denton was. You had Cross's story; he robbed the boy of his sweetheart. You had the Poppetts' story of the Heart's-Ease love nest, and you heard what Miss Venne had to say. Denton was a woman-chaser of the foulest kind. I heard another story to the same effect."

He then told them what Korwood had related that morning.

"There is no actual proof that Denton caused the girl to kill herself," he concluded. "You must just consider the probability in the light of things we know."

"I heard about that when I was making inquiries," said Goff. "The girl was Myrtle Cornish; her father lived in Suffolk. There is next to no doubt that Denton was implicated, but I don't see that it helps us."

"It shows the sort of motive you must look for," said Roger. "More people are killed for financial gain than for any other reason, but when you are dealing with someone who not once but continuously shows himself a home-wrecker and a seducer, it would be very strange if the motive for his murder did not arise from that cause."

"Exactly!" cried Beard. "And we have his victim to hand! Whether Miss Venne shot him, or Bardwell did it, remains to be proved. But I don't think we need look further."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Bennion?" asked Goff.

"It is the exact opposite to what I was trying to show. You *must* look further. I don't mean that there is no case against Bardwell and Miss Venne. They may have done it, though there are one or two points you would have to consider. But when a man gives himself up to this particular vice, nemesis may await him at any time and at any place. It may not be his victim of yesterday but of years ago who will ultimately execute justice."

"I don't get you," said Beard bluntly. "We are concerned with what happened in this club-house last Friday, not with Denton's dirty past."

"A dirty past breeds a threatening future," returned Roger. "Let me put it like this. Suppose Rolls had a daughter who was one of Denton's victims, perhaps a similar case to that of Miss Cornish. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the evil-doer meets the man he has wronged and the debt is paid."

I am not accusing Rolls. So far as I know he never had a daughter and never heard of Denton till he came here. But he stands for the Unknown who might exact vengeance when it was least expected."

"I see what you mean," said Goff, "and you are right. But so is Beard. We have to consider the people who were here last Friday, irrespective of motive. You hold we may discover the motive afterwards."

"Before you go into that," put in Beard, "I would like to hear the points Mr. Bennion said we must consider about Miss Venne and Bardwell."

"Just this," said Roger. "Miss Venne wrote the letter you thought was from Miss or Mrs. W"—Beard looked glum at the reminder and Roger went on quickly—"a mistake any one might have made as her V.V. is more of a trade mark than a signature. In it she threatened to kill Denton or herself. It was not dated and you never asked her when she wrote it."

"She must have written it during those few days. What does it matter which day?"

"The day and even the hour may be important," declared Roger. "Goff made her admit that she had told Bardwell of her previous relations with Denton. I suggest that when Denton tried to blackmail her into accepting his embraces her first reaction was to write that letter. She loved Bardwell and she dreaded the result of Denton's carrying out his threat. But afterwards she took the wiser and more honest step of telling Bardwell herself. Then she had nothing more to fear from Denton and therefore no motive for killing him."

"How does that strike you, Beard?" asked Goff.

"It strikes me that it gave Bardwell a damned good motive."

"But did it?" persisted Roger. "A man may take vengeance for a wrong done to his wife or to his sweetheart; but you are dealing with a couple who are not married, not even engaged. They are in the preliminary stage of getting fond of one another. The girl reveals that she has had an affair—quite willingly—with another man. It would be a shock, but I hardly see in it a motive for murder. Some women would have to own to more than one affair. Is the would-be husband to start a campaign of slaughter?"

"We are not dealing with imaginary cases," said Beard. "Bardwell disliked Denton and he learnt not only that the girl he loved had had an affair with him, but that Denton was doing all in his power to renew it. And Bardwell was on the spot when Denton was killed."

"Then you acquit the girl?" suggested Roger.

"Not at all. You say she had no motive because she had told Bardwell her tale. But that cuts both ways. If Bardwell turned her down, she may have shot the man who made the trouble. She threatened she would."

"Then you charge them both? The girl because Bardwell didn't care, and Bardwell because he did?"

"When the passions are concerned," said Beard, "you can never tell how people will react. The girl may have done it, or Bardwell may have done it—possibly egged on by her."

"I have seen the girl," murmured Goff, who had tackled another plate of ham while the others talked.

"I would like to see Bardwell."

"When you do," said Roger, "there is something you must ask him."

As things had developed he felt he must no longer keep back what he knew.

"On Sunday I chanced to hear Bardwell talking to Rolls. Bardwell suggested Rolls had seen more of the crime than he had admitted. He offered him twenty pounds to stick to his story."

"What did Rolls say?" asked Beard quickly.

"He was curiously non-committal, but he said money did not come into it. Then they were interrupted. The question is, did Rolls see anything, and what does Bardwell imagine it may have been?"

"The sooner we see Bardwell the better," said Goff, "and another word with Rolls may be useful. But meanwhile can we dismiss all the other parties?"

"What other parties?" asked Beard.

"The three other men from Denton's club; Ferrowe and his friends; and the four that Rolls says came in earlier—Pape, Scotton, Taylor and Monford."

"I think you can dismiss the last four," said Roger. "They must have left the premises before Ferrowe and his companions came in, otherwise they would have been seen. Ferrowe and Norton agree there was no one about."

"If Denton was already killed when Ferrowe saw him," Goff pointed out, "one of that lot may have done it."

"I interviewed them," said Beard. "They vow not only that they had never heard of Denton but that they were together all the time and left together. So unless they were all in it and are all lying you can acquit them."

"Good to know that," Goff nodded.

"I think you can also acquit Provost, Oxley and Korwood," said Roger.

He proceeded to relate how his friends had spent

the morning of the day of the crime. Both Goff and Beard laughed at the egg trick practised at Korwood's expense.

"It seemed frivolous enough then," Roger concluded, "but now it becomes important. Is it credible that any one, planning and carrying through a joke like that, can at the same time have been plotting a cold-blooded murder? Human nature is not made that way."

"But Bardwell was in the joke too," objected Goff.

"He was. That is one reason why I believe he is innocent. But his case is exceptional. He was not as full of fun as his friends, though the upset with his Vickie might account for that."

"Mr. Bennion is so convinced that Denton deserved to be killed," said Beard dryly, "that he will try to persuade us no one killed him!"

"Hardly that," laughed Roger. "In my view the pivotal men are Ferrowe and Miller."

"You mean one of them did it?" asked Goff.

"Have they any daughters?" queried Beard.

"I do not know anything about them," said Roger, "and I am not accusing them. They might have done it, though golfers really do not play round with loaded revolvers in their pockets on the chance of seeing someone they dislike."

"Don't get that wrong," said Goff seriously. "Denton was expecting to meet someone; an appointment had been made."

"With a woman," interrupted Beard, "if Rolls is to be believed. What woman could it be but Miss Venne? She wrote that she would have nothing to do with him; then she told Bardwell. He turned her down, and she was out for revenge. That makes sense."

"For the moment," said Goff, "we are considering the other parties, and I do not think what Rolls told us is quite proof enough that it was a woman. What I am driving at is that an appointment had been made and therefore the person who came—came armed. Whether golfers usually carry guns does not arise. A player knows more or less when his game will finish, and to play round first would be a good way to avert suspicion."

"One up to you, Goff," admitted Roger. "I don't think any one would be at their best if they had an appointment for murder at the end of the game. You might inquire whether any of the parties concerned was notably below form."

"But you said Ferrowe and Miller were pivotal men," Beard reminded him.

"Yes. Ferrowe, or Chu Chin Chow as they call him——"

"Why do they call him that?"

"He has a costume for the part."

"Chu Chin Chow was a pretty murderous sort of fellow, wasn't he?" asked Beard.

"You must not judge people by fancy dress," said Roger. "It often works by the rule of reverse. The mildest men love to appear as cut-throats and I would hesitate to say that all Dresden Shepherdesses are the least guileful of women. Anyway we agree if Denton was alive at five o'clock, either Ferrowe or Miller might have killed him. Ferrowe knew him but Miller apparently did not."

"Failing them?" asked Goff.

"He was either killed before they arrived or afterwards."

"Obviously."

"If it was before, Provost or Bardwell could have done it, but not Miss Venne——"

"Why not Miss Venne?" asked Beard.

"Because she was playing behind Ferrowe and did not reach the club-house until later."

"But if Denton was alive when Ferrowe left," said Goff, "Miss Venne or Oxley or Korwood could have done the killing."

"That is how I see it," agreed Roger.

"How does it affect the case against young Cross?"

"Is there a case against Cross? I grant the motive, but he did not make that appointment, and what chance had he to get a revolver? The man or woman who made the appointment had plenty of time to get a weapon, but, until you can show how Cross obtained one, I count him out."

"I agree there," said Goff, "but I am not satisfied about Ferrowe. He admits he saw Denton through the window but says he doesn't know whether he was alive or dead."

"That is his tale," nodded Beard.

"And a pretty tall one," added Goff. "If he had done the killing he would like it to be thought Denton was dead before he arrived. But he cannot say so or he would have to explain why he did not give the alarm."

"According to my time sheet," said Roger, "the longest interval was between ten-past five when Oxley had his quick one, and half-past when Korwood saw the body. I have told you why I do not believe my friends were concerned, but that seems to me the most likely time for the shooting to have been done. Rolls was in his room, the carpenters were busy, and the coast was clear."

"And every one else had gone home except Miss Venne," added Goff.

"And Mr. Bennion tells us she did not do it,"

muttered Beard, "because having made her confession she was no longer interested. It was a murder all right, but there is no murderer!"

At that moment the door opened and Major Gwyer came in. He looked at them all and picked out Goff.

"Good-afternoon," he said. "Rolls told me you were here. I understand you are from Scotland Yard—are you taking the case over?"

The three men rose and Roger introduced the captain of the club.

"No, sir," said Goff, "I am not taking the case over. I am here to collaborate with Inspector Beard as required."

"No doubt you will soon clear things up for us. Rolls told me that young Cross had come back and you had seen him."

"That is so, sir."

"And you have let them go? I hope that means you are satisfied there is nothing against him?"

"We cannot put it as strongly as that," said Goff cautiously, "but at the moment our suspicions point in other directions."

"I am glad," said Gwyer. "He is only a boy and I hope his innocence may be established. Of course I heard the tales that have been told about him. I have a letter for him."

"A letter?"

"Yes. When he left his uncle that afternoon he almost collided with my brother and he dropped a letter. My brother asked me to return it when next I saw him, but, as you know, he went away."

"Have you still got it?" asked Goff.

"I have."

"I must ask you to let me have it, sir."

"I would not like it to be used against him."

"If it is the letter he talked about, and if it contains what he said it does," replied Goff, "it should help him."

Gwyer handed it over and the other three men perused it in silence.

"You have read it, sir?"

"Yes. I read it when it was said he had disappeared."

"You should have let me have it at once, sir," said Beard as severely as he dared.

Gwyer did not reply.

"It is just what he told us," commented Goff. "The girl he was engaged to wrote that she was to marry the uncle instead."

"A bit of a jar when your sweetheart tells you she will be your aunt!" muttered Beard.

"He told you the truth," said Gwyer. "I am glad of that——"

Another interruption. The door was thrown open and a man came into the room at a run.

"You want to see me," he said abruptly.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BARDWELL SATISFIES GWYER

"THIS is Bardwell," said Roger to Goff, by way of explanation.

The C.I.D. expert gave a quick glance at the obviously excited newcomer.

"Let us have these things cleared," he said. "Then we can talk."

Jim Weston answered the bell, and the remains of the luncheon were speedily removed.

"Perhaps you will stay, sir?" said Goff to Major Gwyer. He thought a few words with the captain of the club might be useful.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

They all sat down and this time the London man started the questioning.

"Who told you we wanted to see you?"

"You do, don't you?"

"I asked who told you," said Goff sternly.

Bardwell hesitated. Perhaps he was already regretting his impetuosity.

"Either you do or you don't," he said defiantly. "If you don't, I will go."

"You have been speaking to Miss Venne?"

"What if I have? I am here to answer for myself."

"When did you see her?"

"I have not seen her."

"She telephoned?"

"What does that matter? I am here if you want me."

Goff regarded him for some moments in silence. No one else spoke. The young man moved impatiently, uneasily.

"There are grave suspicions," said the detective, "that you or Miss Venne, or both of you, are concerned in the death of Hugh Denton."

"It isn't true!"

"In that case you had better answer truthfully and simply the questions I shall put to you."

Bardwell did not reply. Goff went on:

"You say Miss Venne telephoned. When did you last see and speak to her?"

"Last week."

"Which day last week?"

"On Thursday night."

"Did she then make a statement to you?"

Bardwell hesitated. "She did."

"To what effect?"

"I refuse to discuss it."

Goff shrugged. "She has told us; I want your confirmation. Did it concern her past relations with Hugh Denton?"

"It did," was the muttered reply.

"Then what did you do?"

"What could I do?"

"Many things, perhaps," answered Goff. "What did you do?"

"I went away."

"And did not speak to her again until she rang you up?"

Bardwell nodded.

"You were done with her?"

"I didn't say that."

"But does it represent the fact?" pressed Goff.

"No," shouted Bardwell, "it does not, and you

have no right to say it. She was entitled to live her own life. It is no affair of yours."

"But you kept away from her?"

"I wanted time to think."

"About Denton?"

"No—in a way, yes."

"You knew that Denton was pressing her to renew the old intimacy?"

"I did not!"

"She did not tell you that?"

"If she had I—I might have killed him!"

"Steady, steady," murmured Gwyer. He was sitting there listening, his finely carved features and his emotionless calm suggestive of a judge wishing only that right might prevail. "You will not be hurried. Think before you speak."

Bardwell looked at him, perhaps gratefully. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. Then Goff resumed.

"Had you been aware of Denton's desires you say you might have killed him—but you were not?"

This time Bardwell did not answer.

"You were in the club-house when he was killed?"

"I was."

"And shortly before the body was found you had been in the lounge?"

"I passed through it. I did not see him."

"When did you last speak to him?"

"I have never spoken to him."

"You want me to believe that? You and he were members of the same club; you met down here, and you have never spoken?"

"If a member of your club is such an outsider that you won't speak to him there, you are even less likely to speak to him elsewhere."

"When did you first know that he and Miss Venne were acquainted?"

This time Bardwell took Gwyer's advice and thought before he replied.

"It was the night he got here. I was with Miss Venne and we met him. He spoke to her."

"Just what happened?"

"He showed the vulgar sort of cad he was. He put his hand on her arm, and said, 'Hallo, Vickie, fancy meeting you! How delightful that the world is so small!' It was his leering manner more than his words that was objectionable."

Bardwell was getting warmer again, but Goff went quietly on.

"What did Miss Venne say to that?"

"Nothing. Or just, 'Good-evening.' We turned away."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. But I looked at him. I think he knew that if he had bothered us further I would have smashed in his jeering sneering smile!"

"Steady!" warned Gwyer again. "The inspector only wants the facts. Don't embellish them."

"I know, sir, but it makes me furious to think of him, even if he is dead."

"Then," went on Goff, "I suppose you asked Miss Venne how she came to know him?"

"She said they had met more than a year before, at a friend's house in town."

"Yet he called her Vickie?"

"I asked her that. She said it was impertinence. He was that kind of man."

"But a few nights afterwards she told you the real story?"

"Yes."

"And you say you had nothing whatever to do with his death?"

"Nothing whatever. But I am glad someone killed him."

"You do not think that someone can have been Miss Venne?"

"No! I am sure it was not! Why should you imagine such a thing?"

"You had turned her down because of him," said Goff dryly. "If she cared for you she may have felt he had spoilt her life."

"That isn't true!" Bardwell's voice rose again to a shout. "I should have seen her when he had gone. His being here poisoned everything. I couldn't bear to be with her and run the risk of meeting him—with his devilish grin!"

"If you had, you might have felt like killing him?" suggested Goff.

"Is that quite fair?" asked Gwyer in his quiet way.

Goff did not pursue the point. He looked at Bardwell and spoke more sternly.

"You say that neither you nor Miss Venne had anything to do with his death?"

"I do."

"Then why did you offer money to the steward to be silent about anything he might have seen?"

To that Bardwell had no answer. A new look of fear showed in his eyes. His face was hot and wet. Again he used his handkerchief.

"I suppose he told you," he muttered.

"Never mind who told us. Why did you do it?"

"He—he was mistaken. I only wanted to know what sort of man he was. To be sure he would not say anything else, even if any one offered him money."

It was a lame, unconvincing explanation. Goff was scornful.

"If you were not concerned in the affair, why should that interest you?"

Again there was no reply.

"I want the truth," said Goff sternly. "If you will not tell me I will send for him."

Still Bardwell was silent.

"Will you ask Rolls to come?" Goff made the request to Beard.

There was a grim silence as the local inspector left the room. He was soon back and Rolls was with him. The steward looked quickly at them all, from Gwyer, the captain of the club, to the inspectors and the unhappy Bardwell. He stood at the end of the triple table.

"Rolls," said Goff, "on Sunday Mr. Bardwell came to you and offered you twenty pounds or more to withhold evidence—is that true?"

It was some moments before Rolls replied. Contrary to his usual manner he did not look his questioner in the face. He did not look at any one; his eyes were fixed on the green cloth in front of him.

"No," he said at last in his thick voice, "that is not quite true. He only asked if I had seen anything I had not talked about."

"Had you?"

"No, sir," replied Rolls very slowly. "I had said all I had to say."

"I did not ask that," snapped Goff sharply. "Had you said all you knew?"

"Yes, sir."

Was there a shade of hesitation in his reply, or did Roger imagine it? Goff was not pursuing that line of inquiry at the moment.

"Yet Mr. Bardwell did offer you twenty pounds?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know why."

"Thank you. You can go."

Slowly, amid another tense silence, Rolls waddled to the door. But the interlude, dramatic in its way, had helped the man it was intended to defeat ; it had given him time to prepare for the next inevitable question.

"Now I want your explanation," said Goff sternly.

The reply came more easily. Bardwell looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I was a fool ; I lost my head. I knew that Miss Venne had been in the club-house at about the time Denton was killed, but I did not want you to know it. I wanted to keep her name out of it. If you learnt about her and—and him, you might easily imagine something that was quite wrong."

"You did not mention Miss Venne to Rolls ? "

"Certainly not. I was fishing about to know if he had seen her. That is really all there was to it."

"You were not fishing to see what he knew about yourself ? " put in Beard sceptically.

"I could look after myself. I wanted to keep her out of it."

"That seems very reasonable," said Gwyer.

The inspectors exchanged glances. They did not appear so easily convinced.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ROGER AND VICKIE

INQUESTS have been described so often, and one is so much like another, that it is unnecessary to deal at length with the proceedings on the Tuesday morning. Indeed it soon became obvious that they were to be of a perfunctory and preliminary character only and that there was no thought of reaching any definite result. They were perhaps more notable for what was omitted than for what was said.

The first witness, young Norman Cross, identified the body as that of his uncle, Hugh Denton. He believed he was his only living relation and said they had come to Allingham for a short golfing holiday. He knew of no one who wished ill to his uncle or might have taken his life.

"I believe you left the hotel on Friday afternoon," said the coroner, "and returned on the Monday?"

"Yes, sir. When I saw in the papers what had happened I came back as soon as I could."

He was asked nothing as to the quarrel or the reason for his sudden departure.

James Lovel, a solicitor, confirmed the identification and gave certain details of Denton's business interests.

Frederick Rolls described how he had found the body and had immediately informed some gentlemen who were in the card-room playing bridge. The police were then summoned.

"If the deceased had been shot can you explain to us how it was you did not hear the shot?"

"Yes, sir. Three carpenters were putting up some lockers in the next room and were hammering all the time."

"When you found the body you did not see any weapon?"

"No, sir."

That was all from Rolls—for the present. The next witness was Dr. Charlot. He described the body as he saw it and said death was due to laceration of the brain caused by a shot fired close to the head and probably from a small calibre revolver. He had extracted the bullet and handed it to the police.

"From the nature of the wound could the deceased have shot himself?"

"Possibly, though not probably. The shot entered above the right ear and travelled in a slightly downward direction. The angle would be an unusual one for a self-inflicted injury. Of course the absence of the weapon precludes suicide."

Then came Mary Poppett.

Her story caused some sensation. She said her husband showed her a photograph in a Sunday paper and she at once recognised it as that of a man she knew as Mr. Harry Drayton who owned a bungalow called Heart's-Ease near Bussingford. He used it for week-ends during the summer and autumn, and she looked after it for him, and did such work as he required.

"You were expecting him that week-end?"

"Yes, sir. When he didn't come and my husband showed me the paper I said it was because he was shot."

"You communicated with the police and subsequently identified the body of Hugh Denton as that of the man you knew as Harry Drayton?"

"Yes, sir. My daughter is keeping company

with a policeman and he told me that was what I must do."

"You have no doubt whatever as to the identification?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm sure of it."

"When Mr. Denton—or Harry Drayton—came for those week-ends was he generally alone?"

"Never, sir. Always a lady with him and not always the same lady. As I told the inspector——"

"Thank you, Mrs. Poppett. That is all."

He cut her off just when, in the opinion of most of those in the court, the affair was beginning to be really interesting. He turned to his jurors.

"The evidence of the last witness has only just reached the police, and, as it may throw a new light on the matter, they require time for investigation. In the circumstances I shall adjourn the inquiry for one week."

Roger was in the court and had not been surprised at the early termination of the hearing. As he made his way out he saw Vickie Venne in the crowd. Their eyes met and she looked away. But a few moments later, it seemed by chance, they were side by side.

"You are angry with me," he said quietly. "You think I let you down."

"Oh, no," she murmured in an icy tone. "I was not aware that you were a police spy. That was all."

"It is useless for me to say I was trying to help you?"

"To trick me into writing that letter—it was to help me!"

"Yes. You were not telling them the truth. The longer the deception lasted the worse it would be. They were bound to find out in the end."

She did not reply. Nothing more was said till they reached the street. Then she asked abruptly:

"Will it be all over next week?"

"That depends on what they discover."

"They still suspect us?"

"They suspect many people. That is their job. But suspicion is not enough. They want proof."

"I cannot bear it if it lasts much longer."

The strain was evidently telling on her. She looked tired and worried. She must have endured an agonising time in the court, not knowing at what moment her name might be blurted out.

"I think you could help, if you would," he said, still more quietly.

"What do you want me to say now?" Her tone was bitter. "If there was anything else, I could tell it them myself. But there isn't. I was turned inside out like a glove."

He did not answer. People were still pressing round them. They walked slowly up the village street until they were clear of the throng.

"Have they found the pistol?"

Again abruptly came one of the questions that had no doubt been much in her mind.

"I believe not."

"When they do—will they know who used it?"

"It will give them something to work on. But it may never be found."

"You said I could help. How?"

"If I ask you something, will you still regard me as a spy or will you believe it is for your sake and his?"

He gave no name, but she knew who was meant. She half-stopped and their eyes met. He was sorry for the suffering of which he saw such unmistakable signs.

"May I ask a question first?"

"Certainly," he said.

"When Bertram saw them—the inspectors—what happened?"

"He has not told you?"

"He has told me nothing." Again there was bitterness in her tone. "I have not seen him."

"His interview with them left things very much as before. He had unwisely offered money to Rolls to be silent about people who were in the club-house at the time of the shooting."

"About me?"

"That is what he said. They were not entirely convinced. He might have been concerned on his own account."

"His own account?" She gave a mirthless little laugh. "He did not shoot Hugh Denton. Surely that is clear enough."

Roger asked what made it so clear.

"If he cared for me enough to do that—would he have kept away all this time?"

It was a woman's reason. She had been eating her heart out in loneliness and anxiety. To her his neglect was the greatest crime of all.

"Is that the right way to look at it?" asked Roger. "If suspicion attached to either of you, may he not have thought it better if you did not meet for a time?"

To that she made no answer. They walked on for a little way. Then she said:

"What is it you want me to tell you?"

"Just this. When and where did Denton ask you to renew your friendship, and threaten to tell Bardwell if you refused?"

She flushed. "What good can it do to discuss that?"

"Then let me ask you something else. Did any one here other than Bertram Bardwell know of that past friendship?"

"Don't call it friendship! It was madness. No. No one knew."

"You are sure of that? Not your father, for instance?"

"My father is crippled with rheumatism and seldom goes out."

"Not Ferrowe, or Miller, or Norton, or Benting, or Major Gwyer or his brother—or any of the members here? I have only met a few of them. Or Bardwell's friends—Provost, Oxley, or Korwood?"

"No one can have known of it. It was all over before I met Bertram and long before I came here. Besides—if any one did know—what difference would it make? Why should they care?"

"What I am getting at," said Roger, "is this. Someone arranged to meet Denton that afternoon. Rolls thought it was a woman and from what we know of Denton it is probable he was right. Did Denton know any woman here other than yourself?"

"You told me he was engaged to be married."

"That girl does not live in this neighbourhood."

"She was not at the inquest?"

"I believe not."

"Who is she?"

Her curiosity was natural enough, and Roger felt she had some right to hear the story.

"The nephew, young Cross, said he had a sweetheart and his uncle stole her from him."

"And the uncle would have married her?"

"So he said."

"Then his death does her a bit of good," murmured Vickie, "even if no one else benefits. But I arranged no meeting with him. So if I was the only woman he knew, Rolls was mistaken. How does it help?"

"Rolls may have been right. My suggestion is that someone else may have used your name. Denton

waited from four-thirty for half an hour, perhaps for an hour. He would not have done that without good reason."

"But I do not see——"

"People in this country do not walk about with firearms on the chance of meeting someone they dislike. The person who arranged to meet Denton came prepared to kill him."

"Yes. I see that."

"If someone sent him a message in your name, that on thinking things over you decided it would be better to meet and you might then come to some arrangement—he would have waited, wouldn't he?"

"Yes," she said slowly, "I think he would. But——"

"So the question is if any one could have known enough of the affair to use your name. Not that they were concerned in you, but because they wanted to get him at a time and in a place that suited them."

"I understand; but I do not see how it is possible."

"It is quite possible if your conversation with Denton was overheard. I know it is unpleasant, but I am not asking out of curiosity. How often did you meet him here?"

"Three times," said Vickie, after a moment of hesitation. "The first time was the day he got here. I met him in the lounge."

"That was the afternoon when I saw you with him?"

"Did you? I didn't know. Rolls was about, but he could not have heard. I did not see any one else."

"What happened?"

"He—he pretended to be glad to see me and suggested our—our friendship should be renewed."

"You refused?"

"I refused. I told him what I thought of him."

"And then?"

"Later in the evening he saw me with Bertram. That made him guess I would not want Bertram to know about it."

"Then you met again?"

"The next day. On the links. No one else was there. He pretended he still cared for me, and he said unless I agreed to what he wanted he would congratulate Bertram from his own experience. He was hateful—horrible."

The words were only just audible. It was not easy to say them.

"After that you sent him your letter?"

"Yes. And then I told Bertram."

"The only occasion on which you could have been overheard was the first, in the club-house?"

"We were not shouting!"

"I do not suppose you were, but I heard something. The window was open, and you would not have seen any one in the doorway. A few words may imply a lot; enough, anyway, to suggest the use of your name."

"You do not know my name was used. If it was, you only make it worse for Bertram. There could be no one else."

She stopped and faced him. All the old suspicions seemed to come back.

"I am trying to discover," said Roger patiently, "an alternative to Bertram. We do not know your name was used, but we have to explain why Denton waited. It is the only theory so far that seems satisfactory."

"You are so anxious to catch the person who shot him?"

"I am so anxious that the wrong person should not be caught."

"You do not—you do not suspect us?"

"I do not."

They had reached her gate. She held out her hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Bennion. I am sorry I was stupid and difficult, but I have been through hell. Those other men frightened me."

"It will all come right," he said. Then he smiled. "Any message for Bertram?"

"Tell him——" She flushed a little. "No. No message."

CHAPTER TWENTY

LET THE GAME GO ON

WHEN Roger got back to the hotel, lunch was in progress. He found his friends deep in a golf squabble. Surely such men could not be concerned in crime!

"Most of the old maxims are wrong," Oxley had declared. "Keep your eye on the ball—whoever heard such nonsense? And what tripe has been written about the follow-through."

Probably he said it to get a rise out of Korwood. If so, he was not unsuccessful.

"But you must keep your eye on the ball," protested his friend. "If you look up you mis-hit it. Every one knows that."

"And why do you look up? In the attempt to keep your eye on the ball! Therefore you should not do it. You must keep your eye where the ball *was*."

"There is something in that," remarked Provost. "I knew a man who after driving always trod where

the ball had been. That kept his head steady and the ball had gone quite a distance before he looked up."

"If you put it like that," admitted Korwood, "but the follow-through——"

"Doesn't matter a darned thing," declared Oxley.

"It must," muttered Bardwell.

"I'll prove it doesn't," said Oxley. "When you drive, for what distance do you suppose the club and the ball are in actual contact?"

"You are telling us," said Korwood.

"Then I will. For a little over half an inch."

"How do you know?"

"It has been proved by photography. The club hits the ball; they travel together for half an inch and then the ball goes ahead. What earthly difference can it make to the shot what happens to the club when the ball is away?"

"Is that a fact?" asked Korwood, much impressed.

"It is," said Oxley. "If the club could stop dead after that half-inch, or break, or curl round your neck, it would be all the same."

"Do you believe that, Bennion?" asked Korwood.

"More or less," replied Roger. "As Oxley says, it is the contact that matters; but that is so brief that you really knew nothing about it. The follow-through tells you what must have happened. Therefore a clean follow-through means a clean hit."

"He is almost as sound at golf as at crime," murmured Oxley in his half-jeering way. "What did you think of the inquest?"

Korwood had told them of Major Gwyer's revelations as to Roger's previous experiences and they were duly impressed, even if they pretended otherwise.

"It was pretty much as I expected," he said, "the police are still looking for evidence."

"Mrs. Poppett provided a very effective curtain to the first act," commented Provost. "It was hardly surprising to hear that Denton had such a resort, but does it really affect matters?"

"That may depend," said Roger, "on whether they can establish any connection between Heart's-Ease and here."

Bardwell looked uncomfortable. He knew of a link between the two places, but he said nothing. Could there be another?

"You may be able to help them, Bennion," said Korwood, "but what they really need is an Inspector Hornleigh of the B.B.C. His criminals always made a mistake and he always spotted it."

"His criminals were uncommonly obliging," remarked Oxley, "and he was very easily convinced. They made a slip of the tongue and he hanged 'em for it. I would have liked to hear a good counsel cross-examining Hornleigh."

"That is always the difference between fiction and fact," agreed Roger. "A clever sleuth gives you the final story of what he says happened, but you never hear an equally clever lawyer trying to pull it to pieces. In one Hornleigh case a man was being taken up in a lift to the scene of a crime he professed to know nothing about. 'This is the floor,' he is supposed to have said. 'Therefore you are guilty,' declared Hornleigh. 'How else could you know which floor it was?'"

"Sheer piffle," said Oxley.

"No," differed Roger, "good entertainment. When you have to set out a problem, with perhaps half a dozen characters, and its solution, all in ten minutes, no one must expect anything subtle or

elaborate. But I own I wondered how Hornleigh's story would sound in court. The accused would probably declare he did not say, 'This is the floor,' but, 'Is this the floor?' It wouldn't cut much ice either way."

"Marshall Hall, the great criminal lawyer, once saved a woman's life by a trick of elocution," observed Provost.

"What was that?" they asked him.

"You can read about it in his life. An unmarried mother was charged with smothering her baby. The nurse said the woman had asked her, 'How can any one *get rid* of a child like this?' Showing murderous intent. Marshall Hall suggested what the woman had really said was, 'How *can* any one get rid of a child like this?' Showing maternal affection. The jury adopted his view."

"Which shows the need of proof," said Roger, "and the dangers of circumstantial evidence."

"In the Denton case," added Korwood, "there is circumstantial evidence pointing in half a dozen different directions, but no proof."

"Forget it," said Oxley. "We play another round this afternoon. No one can put up a decent game when you persist in dangling hangman's nooses in front of them. It is you and me, Bennion; and Provost and Bardwell. Korwood is a bye."

"I shall come round with you," declared Korwood. "I am not going to be left by myself with murderers still at large!"

"When we finish," asked Bardwell, who had been very silent, "do we foregather here or in the club-house?"

"For Korwood's sake," smiled Roger, "shall we avoid the club-house?"

"Don't mind me," said Korwood. "I'll be

all right provided I am not left alone with Oxley."

"I think the club-house," decided Provost. "There is no card-room here and in the lounge every one will be chattering about Denton and Mrs. Poppett."

They agreed. But it was a decision some of them were to regret.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE SECOND VICTIM

It is no doubt true that a man's golf suffers when his conscience is uneasy, but it would be unfair to assume that bad play is in itself a proof of crime. If such were the case the devotees of the game would appear to lapse from virtue even more frequently than their critics suspect.

That afternoon Oxley was far from showing his best form and his conversation soon indicated that he was more curious about the proceedings of the morning than his lunch-time dismissal of hangman's nooses had suggested.

"What are your police friends doing now?" he asked Roger almost as soon as the match began.

"Goff, I believe, is returning to London to make further inquiries that end, and perhaps to visit the Heart's-Ease bungalow. Beard is carrying on down here."

"I hope he is not worrying any more about my dash for that letter?"

"You must admit you were asking for trouble," said Roger.

"I was, yet I believe I should do the same again.

I am not defending Denton's private life ; it just didn't concern me. But he was a devilish shrewd business man. When those chaps were calling him all the names under the sun, it would have been rather a scoop if I could have told them, if they wanted to play here again, it would be by his permission, because he owned it. But when he was dead it was different. I didn't want them to know I had brought him."

It was a lengthy explanation and rather an unnecessary one. Was Oxley still apprehensive ?

"It's no use shutting one's eyes to things," he went on a little later. "If Denton's nephew didn't shoot him, the police are bound to try to pin it on one of us. No one else knew him. But, as a matter of fact, I am the only one who wouldn't have done it."

"Do you mean one of the others would ?"

"Not quite that," said Oxley. "I mean his death was a definite loss to me, but they were glad about it. Provost hated him."

"Provost is not of the murdering kind," commented Roger.

"You mean he is quiet and cool—a bit deliberate ? There are two murdering kinds, the hot-tempered and impulsive and the slow and calculating. Korwood is just the opposite to Provost—taking them as types, of course—yet either might be guilty of the same crime."

"A man who loves animals and collects birds' eggs is not a likely murderer."

"I am not regarding murder as a habit," said Oxley, "but as a thing any man might do under stress."

"That is where motive comes in," Roger remarked. "What about Bardwell ?"

"He is another type ; pleasant as a rule, but more temperamental. He can be either moody or excited. I have known him lose his temper with a man and go off at the deep end with very little provocation. But if he had an upset with his girl he had no time to think about Denton."

Oxley evidently knew nothing of the cause of the upset, and Roger did not enlighten him. It might have to be told in public, but till then the less said the better.

"Mind you, these fellows are friends of mine. I have known them for years and like all of them. But when an affair of this sort comes along you are bound to look at things differently."

"That is the curse of it," said Roger. "It makes every one suspicious until it is cleared up."

Their conversation was more disjointed than this record suggests. The game had been proceeding and their remarks were made when from time to time they were together. Oxley was not playing well, but he held that since a bisque can only count once it was good to use it as soon as possible, to establish a lead or to prevent the opponent from so doing. The first hole was halved.

"I take a bisque," he said. "One up."

The second and third he would have lost, but more bisques retained his lead. The fourth he halved, but another bisque made him two up.

"I played a man for a quid a little while ago," he chuckled, "giving him two bisques. We were all square at the eighteenth and he had them still in hand. He put two balls into the water and so lost the match and the money and went to bed with the bisques. That was a lesson to me."

But it did not help him. Roger holed one lucky putt from just off the green but otherwise was

playing the straight steady stuff that makes the game look so easy.

"How goes it?" asked Korwood, joining them at the tenth.

"He is one up," said Oxley shortly.

"Bisques in hand?"

"No. All gone."

"You must take it more seriously," grinned Korwood. "I have just left the others. Bardwell is clean off his game. Provost is smothering him."

That hole also went to Roger, his second shot reaching the green and enabling him to score a birdie.

"Pretty work," said Korwood. "You may win our cash, but don't forget what it will cost you!"

"I won't," laughed Roger, "but you must remind Provost of that."

Oxley won the eleventh with a wonderful approach over the trees on to the green, but then he was done. Roger took the match by four and three. Korwood put down a ball and they finished as a threesome, reaching the club-house just after the others. Provost had won by an even wider margin, six and five.

"Let us have tea in the card-room, Rolls."

"Right, sir."

There seemed to be no one else about and, after a wash, they sat down to the other game that shared their affection.

History, it has been said, repeats itself with a difference. It was sadly true that afternoon. They started to play at approximately half-past four. Partners were changed and the luck of the cards showed its usual waywardness. The hands were interesting and the calling sound. Then at about half-past five Korwood, who had cut out, burst into the room. This time he showed no hesitation, no reluctance to interrupt the play.

"I say, you fellows, come here! Something has happened to Rolls."

He stood in the open doorway, and his breathless horrified words brought them all to their feet.

"What is it?"

"Where is he?"

"Is he hurt?"

He did not answer their questions, but turned back to the lounge. They strode after him.

On the floor of the ingled enclosure, in a pathetic, almost ludicrous heap, lay the body of the steward. It was at the very foot of the place where Hugh Denton had been found the week before. But Rolls had not been shot. By his side was a heavy iron poker and from the trickle of blood on his head there seemed little doubt as to the weapon that had struck him.

"I didn't move him," muttered Korwood; "but I do not think he is dead."

Roger knew something of first aid. He saw a small mirror on the bar counter that advertised cigarettes, and held it to the nose and mouth of the prostrate man. He also felt his wrist and his heart.

"Not dead," he said, "but pretty far gone. No use to lift him. I think we might turn him over and put a cushion under his head."

It seemed natural for Roger to take the lead. They did as he suggested. Poor Roly-poly! What fiendish hand had struck that cruel blow?

"Would you telephone Dr. Charlot?" Roger asked Provost. "You might tell him what has happened, but if he is out we must get someone else. I will find Mrs. Rolls. Then we must inform the police. Would you others see if there is any one about the place? You might try the pro's shop, Korwood. Perhaps they saw something."

Roger was cool and unhurried, but he wasted no time. While the others did as he suggested, he pressed the bell by the bar and then raised the flap to go behind to the steward's private quarters.

"Mrs. Rolls!"

There was no response to the ring or the call. He looked into the kitchen. No one was there. From the sitting-room came the murmur of voices. But it, too, was empty. A wireless set purred softly on a small table close to an easy-chair. On the floor, a newspaper; on the table, a pipe. Rolls might have been enjoying a quiet moment when something caused him to go out to face that murderous attack.

Roger touched nothing except the pipe. The bowl was cool but not cold.

At the end of the little passage was an outer door used by tradespeople, and near it a flight of stairs to the upper floor. Two bedrooms and a bathroom. All beautifully clean and tidy, but all empty. The silence was almost eerie. Roger hurried back to the lounge.

"Dr. Charlot is on his way," said Provost.

"There doesn't seem to be a soul in the place," added Oxley. "We couldn't get an answer, so we went into the ladies' rooms. They are empty."

"The pro's shop is shut," said Korwood. "It is raining fairly fast. Has been, by the look of it, for some time."

They stared at one another. They were alone in the club-house—alone with the unconscious man.

"Will he be able to tell us anything?" Bardwell whispered the thought that was probably in the mind of each one of them.

"It is very doubtful," said Roger. "I will 'phone Inspector Beard."

He got through to the police station and described

what had happened. The officer in charge said that Beard was out, but they would get in touch with him, and he would come as speedily as possible. Meanwhile they must do as Dr. Charlot might direct.

What next? After a moment's thought Roger gave Major Gwyer's number. It was bad luck on him, but as captain of the club he ought to be informed, and he might make useful suggestions.

His housekeeper replied. Major Gwyer was out; so was his brother.

"Can I get them anywhere?" asked Roger.

"They went to Southampton, sir, yesterday, on business. They are not coming back till to-morrow. I can give you the hotel, if you like."

"Please," said Roger.

Everything seemed to be as awkward as possible. He had noticed the Gwyers were not at the inquest, but was unaware that they had gone to bid farewell to friends who were off on a world cruise. In one thing he was lucky; he got through to the hotel almost immediately and in a few moments was speaking to Gwyer himself.

"Hurt—badly hurt—you don't mean he is killed?"

"He is still alive, sir. We are expecting Dr. Charlot, but I am afraid there is not much hope."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" His tone showed that Major Gwyer was genuinely distressed. "Have you seen his wife?"

"She seems to be out."

"And the stepson, young Weston?"

"He is out too. There isn't a soul in the place except my friends and myself."

"Of course you have no idea how it happened?"

"Not the slightest. We are waiting for Inspector Beard."

"It is terrible, terrible. It was good of you to let me know, but it would take nearly two hours for me to get back. I am afraid I cannot manage it to-night. When Mrs. Rolls returns please tell her how very grieved I am. I hope things are not quite as bad as you say. Her son had better carry on for the time being. I will be back early to-morrow."

When he rang off Roger found that Charlot had arrived and had made some sort of an examination. His cheery face was unusually grave.

"Has he any chance?" asked Roger.

"None, I am afraid. I doubt if he will recover consciousness."

"If he does, he might tell us something."

"If he does!"

"Is it possible to say when the blow was struck?"

"No. It is not."

Charlot was not generally snappy, but there was no doubt that the murderous assault on a man he knew, and probably liked, had badly upset him.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" asked Roger.

"No. I will stay by him till Beard comes. If you are waiting, I will call if I want anything."

It was a dismissal. The other four had been standing round, probably asking similar questions. Charlot, no doubt, would sooner be without them.

"We might wait in the card-room," said Roger quietly. "If there is anything we can do, please let us know."

The doctor nodded, but said nothing. It may be he thought there was much for them to explain, but it was not for him to ask the questions.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A SHOCK FOR MRS. ROLLS

"I TOLD you so!" exclaimed Korwood. "I said there would be a second murder, and you said things did not really happen that way."

"You are right enough this time," muttered Oxley, "if he dies."

"But why should any one attack Rolls?" asked Provost.

"I don't think that is difficult," answered Korwood. "He knows more about Denton's death than he told. So someone thought it safer to silence him."

"You mean it is the same person?" queried Bardwell.

"No doubt of it," declared Korwood. "What do you think, Bennion?"

Roger had been silent since they returned to the card-room. It was hardly likely that Korwood's explanation had not occurred to him.

"The most useful thing we can do," he said quietly, "is to prepare a note of our own movements while they are fresh in our memory. We have the score sheets and that may help us. So far as we know, we were the only people here when we came in and the only people when we found him."

"You are not suggesting that one of us——" began Bardwell.

"I am only suggesting that we make a note of our movements and see if it throws any light on things. Beard is sure to ask about it, and it may save time."

"I never went out there till I found him," exclaimed Korwood, a little excitedly. "I found Denton too. I hope no one will imagine from that that I had anything to do with it!"

"Let us start from the beginning," said Roger. "We commenced to play at half-past four, or a bit earlier. I was not in the first rubber and went out and had a talk with Rolls. So far as I am aware there was no one else about. We discussed this morning's inquest. Nothing important was said, but Rolls gave me the impression of being—how shall I put it?—not so cheery as usual. I did not stay long, but, except for that air of worry, he was right enough then. Of course there is only my word for it. I came back and did not go out again. Provost and Oxley made three no-trumps. That brings us to about four-forty."

"My experience may be more important," said Provost. "Oxley and I won the next hand making our rubber. We re-cut and Oxley and I were together again, against you, Bennion, and Korwood. Oxley called four hearts and was doubled. I put my cards down and went to the cloak-room. Rolls was serving drinks to those two men who were here before. Ferrowe and Miller are their names, I believe. The two who play with them were washing their hands."

"Norton and Benting," suggested Roger.

"I believe that is right. I was only gone a few minutes and was back in time to see Oxley finish, one down. It would have brought the time to five o'clock or a little after. I did not go out again."

"Five o'clock," said Roger, noting the details given. "Rolls was all right then and those four men were still on the premises."

"Looks as though one of them will have to do a bit of explaining," commented Oxley.

"It lets you out, Bennion," said Korwood.
 "Lucky for you!"

"It also lets out Provost," added Roger, "provided Ferrowe and his friends confirm what he says, as no doubt they will."

"But what about them?" persisted Oxley.

"They must answer for themselves," said Roger.
 "For the moment we are only looking at things from our own angle."

"I was out of that rubber," began Bardwell, perhaps a little nervously. "After Oxley's four hearts, Korwood and Bennion made three no-trumps. I don't know what happened next. I went outside while Bennion was dealing."

"How long were you away?" asked Roger.

"Don't you know? Not very long—just one hand. I—I wondered if there were any ladies about. I went to their door and looked inside, but could not see any one. I noticed it had started to rain."

"Were you expecting to see any one?"

"No."

Possibly he had hoped that Vickie would be there. Apparently she was not.

"You saw no one at all?"

"No."

"Ferrowe and his friends had gone?"

"Must have."

"And you did not see Rolls?"

"I did not," said Bardwell.

"If he was on the floor of the cubby-hole, one wouldn't see him?"

"Not unless you specially looked. I went straight through."

"But you were looking for a lady," said Oxley.

"I shouldn't look for her on the floor," retorted Bardwell warmly.

"That," said Roger, "must bring us to about twenty-past five. While you were away what happened was that Korwood put me up to four spades, which I got. That made our rubber and let you in."

"And put me out," said Korwood. "Bardwell is quite right about not seeing Rolls on the floor. When you fellows got going again I thought I would gather you some whiskies. So I went out and rang the bell. There was no answer. I rang it again and moved across to the window while I was waiting. And then I saw him. I know now what people mean when they say things gave them quite a turn. I felt pretty queer and came and told you about it. As Bennion put it, you have only my word for it, but that is what happened. It was just half-past five."

"I did not cut out," remarked Oxley. "It would have been my turn next."

"But you went out just before I did," said Korwood quickly.

"That is right," confirmed Roger. "The first hand of the new rubber. You and I were together. You put me up in diamonds and left me to play it."

"So I did. I remember now. But I was only gone for half a minute. My pouch was in my golf jacket; I went to get it."

"You saw no one outside?"

"Not a soul. Rolls might of course have been on the floor. I didn't look."

Had he really forgotten that he had been out? Or had he waited to see if any one else remembered it?

"Then we narrow it down to between five and five-thirty," said Roger, completing his notes. "There must have been a gap of about fifteen minutes after Provost came back and before Bardwell

went out. During that interval Ferrowe and his friends cleared off and the blow might have been struck. Then there was nearly ten minutes before Oxley went out and four or five after he came back and before Korwood rang the bell and found the body."

"How long would it take to strike the blow," asked Korwood, "and get away?"

"Figure it out yourself," said Roger. "How long does it take to swing a club? As to getting away, there are the two exits; the front door and the way through the locker-room. Once outside with no one about, the time factor hardly comes into it."

"A bit daring, if it was an outsider," said Korwood again, "to do it while we were here."

"How was any one to know we were here?" asked Provost.

"Ferrowe and his pals did," commented Oxley. "If you saw them, as you say, they saw you."

"It may have been someone from outside," suggested Bardwell, "a tramp, or even a groundsman. Have you looked to see if the till is all right?"

"I have not," answered Roger. "It is hardly my job, and I do not know what there ought to be. But it is a thing to ask about."

"A few days ago," said Korwood impressively, "someone shot Denton and got away with it. Now, at almost the same hour, they have laid out Rolls. I bet there is nothing missing from the till. This isn't a sneak-thief business. The devil who did it wanted to keep Rolls quiet."

"That is Inspector Beard," interrupted Roger.

He hurried from the room, but it was not Beard he had heard. He caught a glimpse of Mrs. Rolls going up the little staircase and behind her was her

son, Jim Weston. They had entered through the back door.

"Weston!" he called.

"Yes, sir." Weston came into the bar.

"You have been out all afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. Been taking my mother to the pictures. Very fond of them, she is."

"I am afraid there is bad news for her. You had better prepare her for it before she comes down."

Roger had lowered his voice so that it should not be heard in the bedroom.

"Bad news, sir? What's happened? Nothing wrong with the old man?" Jim looked startled and apprehensive.

"Something very wrong, I am afraid," said Roger. "Has any one been at the till?"

"At the till?" Almost mechanically Jim pressed a button and opened it. It contained a fair amount of money. "Looks all right, sir, but I can check it. Where is he?"

"About half an hour ago he was found on the floor over there. . . ." Roger indicated the enclosure. "He had been struck on the head and was unconscious. He is not likely to recover. You had better bring your mother, but tell her as gently as you can."

"I will, sir—but, oh, my God, what shall I say? To think we were enjoying ourselves! Who did it, sir? Can't the doctor do anything?"

The young fellow seemed almost more bewildered than distressed. He shrank from his job, as well he might, but he knew he must do it.

"Dr. Charlot is with him now," said Roger. "You had better fetch her at once. He is not likely to last long."

"I will, sir. But it's—it's horrible. After that

other death too. And it was only yesterday he was telling me to polish up the fire-irons as we should soon be starting fires. Poor old fellow! Mother thought the world of him."

A few moments later Mrs. Rolls appeared. A trim little woman, a great contrast to her bulky husband; happy and hard-working, with bright eyes and cheeks that had retained something of their country freshness. Now she looked strained and horror-stricken.

Roger took her gently by the hand and led her to her man, still breathing, but still unconscious. She threw herself on her knees by his side.

"Oh, Fred!" she sobbed.

*Some love me some love me
I love one & that is INDU*

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

RE-ENTER CHU CHIN CHOW

"It was no use wasting time at Heart's-Ease," said Inspector Goff, "when the killer was down here."

"You learned nothing fresh at that end?" inquired Roger Bennion.

"I learned a good deal more about Denton—mostly indicating his amorous indulgences—but nothing that helped to show who killed him, or who killed this man Rolls."

It was the afternoon of the next day. Goff had hurriedly returned and Major Gwyer was back from Southampton. Inspector Beard had asked them and Roger to meet him at the club-house.

"I have had Dr. Charlot's report," said Beard. "Rolls died during the evening without regaining consciousness. He had been struck two blows; one on the top of the head and one at the base of the

skull. Either might have proved fatal. Charlot's theory is that the first blow, struck from behind, knocked him over and the second, on the neck, was when he was down. The poker was used. There is blood and hair on it, but unfortunately no fingerprints. The cash register shows nothing had been taken from the till, and the valuables about the place—silver cups and so on—are undisturbed. So it was not a case of theft. I think we must conclude that this death is connected with that of Hugh Denton last week."

Beard looked round the little company for their comment and agreement.

"You assume that," said Gwyer, "because they are both deaths from violence and happened within a week of one another? You have no positive evidence of any connection?"

"We soon may have," answered Beard, "but that is partly why I asked you, sir, to come over. From your knowledge of Rolls, is it likely he was mixed up in any way with Denton's affairs?"

"Extremely unlikely, I should say. He told us he had never seen Denton until he arrived here a week ago. I have no reason to doubt that."

"You had known Rolls a long time?"

"He served under me in the war. He was in poor circumstances when I ran across him some years afterwards, and I got him this job."

"And he always gave satisfaction?"

For a moment Gwyer hesitated. Then he said, "I always felt I could vouch for him in every way."

"The thing is this, sir," said Goff briskly, "we have reason to believe that Rolls knew more about Denton's death than he told us."

"You mean he knew who killed him?"

"That's about it."

"Then why did he not tell you?"

The C.I.D. man shrugged his big shoulders. "There is such a thing as blackmail."

"Rolls expected to be paid to keep quiet?"

"That's it, sir. He was offered twenty pounds in one quarter, but he didn't tell us so. If Mr. Bennion hadn't chanced to hear it, we should never have known."

"Did he accept the twenty pounds?"

"Not he," grunted Goff. "He was too cute for that. He would wait to see how things shaped, and if they went right it would have been a matter of hundreds or thousands, not twenties."

"I think you are doing him an injustice," said Gwyer.

Then Roger put a question. "If his death had nothing to do with the Denton affair, can you suggest any motive, any reason for the attack on him?"

"I cannot," replied Gwyer slowly. "But are you justified in dismissing the idea of theft merely because nothing was taken? His assailant might have thought he was alone and then discovered that was not the case. When you or one of your friends came out of the card-room the would-be thief might have made off empty-handed."

"He could have waited a few moments and come back," said Beard.

"The assailant was there to kill," declared Goff. "The two blows prove that. The first was a knock-out. It would have enabled a thief to grab what he was after and get away. But one blow did not satisfy him. He struck another when the man was down. From a different angle and at the most vulnerable point, the top of the spinal column. It was deliberate murder."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Beard.

"Then let us get on," said Goff briskly. "We had a certain number of suspects for crime number one; how many of them were on the spot for crime number two?"

"Most of them," said Beard grimly.

"Let us check them." Goff turned the leaves of his notebook. "Norman Cross?"

"No," replied Beard. "He left for London immediately after the inquest."

"Good for him. Did you check up on his story?"

"I did. O.K. so far as it goes. The super at Brecon saw the girl, Wanda Moffatt. She was of course very cut up at Denton's death; thought him wonderful. She had not seen young Cross and was unaware he had been in the neighbourhood, with the idea of calling on her."

"But he had?"

"Yes. They found the pub where he stayed, and his car was in a local garage—all as he said."

"Then that clears him," suggested Gwyer.

"Clears him of everything except shooting his uncle!" said Beard sardonically. "He might have done that before he started."

"Had the uncle been knocked out with the poker," commented Roger, "I could believe Cross did it. But until you can show how he got a gun I think his story stands."

"Anyway," interposed Goff, "Cross was not here when the poker was used on Rolls. How about Miss Victoria Venne?"

"She was at a bridge party," said Beard. "I have checked that."

"Then she is out. Not that a girl is likely to attack a man with a poker. Bardwell?"

"Bardwell was here on both occasions," said Beard. "So were his friends who all knew and

disliked Denton. Korwood was the first to see the body in each case."

"Was he?" whistled Goff.

"Perhaps," Roger interrupted, "it would save time if I gave you the statement as to our movements signed by the five of us who were in the card-room last night."

He handed it across the table, adding:

"It is my opinion that Rolls was killed shortly after five o'clock."

"How do you get that?" asked Goff.

"I went to his sitting-room about five-thirty. The wireless was on and his pipe was cool. Not stone cold, but about as cold as a partly smoked pipe gets if it is put down for half an hour. At five or thereabouts Provost saw Ferrowe and Miller at the bar getting drinks. My idea is that one of them rang the bell and Rolls put down his pipe to answer it. He never went back. If he had, he would have relit his pipe and it would have been a good deal warmer. I don't profess that my judgment is infallible, but as a pipe smoker I can make a good guess."

"It sounds pretty likely," nodded Goff. "It is your idea, then, that either Ferrowe or Miller——?"

"Or someone just after they had gone," put in Roger.

"I asked Ferrowe and his friends to come along," said Beard. "They ought to be here now. I will go and see."

"Not much thumb-biting about this," remarked Goff, as his colleague went to the door. He was looking at Roger's time-table and score-sheet.

"You mean two rubbers in an hour is quick going? That is so. My friends are not unduly broody."

Goff nodded and turned to Major Gwyer.

"Is it not risky to leave those silver cups in the charge of one man—to say nothing of the contents of the till?"

"It is very seldom that Rolls is alone," said Gwyer. "It just happened that Mrs. Rolls and her son had gone to the pictures. I admit I do not see how any one could have counted on that, and of course in an ordinary way members are passing in and out all the time. The cups are locked in the safe at night."

"Trophies are difficult things to handle," added Roger. "Very bulky, and no one would buy them as they are. Melted down, the value would be small. Cash is different; but as the till was intact, I am inclined to agree with Goff that the second blow shows that murder was the object, not theft."

Beard returned and brought with him Ferrowe, the famous Chu Chin Chow.

"Good day, Gwyer," he said breezily, "if you persist in having murders here your old members will have to find a club with fewer excitements. But I am sorry about Rolls. He was a sound fellow. Will you be starting a fund for Mrs. Rolls?"

"You were here yesterday afternoon?" Goff interrupted.

"I was. I arrived at four minutes to five."

"You are very exact," said the inspector sharply.

"I remembered from last time," replied Ferrowe.

"I pointed to the clock and told Miller it was nearing the murder hour—was he ready with an alibi? Of course I was pulling his leg. I did not think such a thing could happen again—even here."

"How long did you stay?"

"Afraid I can't tell you that. Rolls had his wireless running, and the Children's Hour started just before

I went. I admired his innocent tastes. But I can tell you one thing."

"What is that?"

"This time I looked over the screen, and no one, not even a body, was the other side. I drew Miller's attention to the curious fact."

Ferrowe's jauntiness seemed a little out of place. Perhaps it was assumed to conceal his nervousness. And a man might well be nervous when twice within a few days he had been the last, or among the last, to be with a victim found murdered!

"You saw no one at all?" asked Goff.

"Not that side of the partition. A man walked through to the card-room."

"To the card-room, or from it?"

"To it. He came from the dressing-room."

"Who was it?"

"One of the four from Denton's club—the big one. I don't know his name."

That confirmed Provost's story and showed that Rolls was alive at five o'clock.

"You and Miller left together?"

At this for a moment Ferrowe was silent. No doubt he was realising the seriousness of the position.

"No," he said, "we did not. I went first. It takes longer to drink a glass of sherry than a double whisky."

"I should not have thought so," said Goff.

"He means," explained Roger, "you sip the sherry and toss off the whisky."

"So you left Miller there?" asked the detective.

"Yes. He was meaning to walk home across the links, and I was driving. But as it was raining I went back to ask if he would like a lift."

"He was still in the lounge?"

"As a matter of fact he was not. I returned to my

car and was just starting off when he came out the back way, from the dressing-room. So I picked him up and took him home."

"Did you see Rolls?"

"He was talking to Miller when I left, but when I looked in at the door afterwards I did not see either of them."

"How long after was that?"

"I don't know," said Ferrowe. "Three or four minutes. Perhaps more."

"It took all that time to go to your car and come back because it was raining?"

"Not at all."

"What do you mean?"

"If you promise not to interrupt"—there was a return to Ferrowe's former manner—"I will try to remember all I did."

"Go on, then."

"First I looked into the dressing-room to see if Norton and Benting had gone. They had. They'd been lucky all the afternoon and it still held. Otherwise you might have been grilling them instead of me. I lit a cigarette and put my bag in the car. The car was about fifty yards away. Then it wouldn't start. It's the old one I use as a runabout, but it won't always run as soon as it should. When it got going I noticed the rain was coming on faster, so I went back for Miller. That was another fifty yards."

"So Miller was alone with Rolls for perhaps three minutes?"

"About that. Long enough to hit him over the head, if that's what you mean. Of course the idea is absurd."

"And on your return," said Goff, "you also had time to hit him over the head."

"Which is even more absurd," declared Ferrowe. "I liked Rolls—didn't I, Gwyer? Why should I attack him?"

"You were on the spot more or less when Denton was killed, weren't you?" persisted Goff.

"You say so."

"We think Rolls was attacked because he knew something of that affair."

"You are trying to insinuate that I did it? That I killed them both?" Ferrowe spoke warmly. "I resent it. I liked Rolls and I had nothing against Denton."

"Only a matter of twelve thousand pounds that in your view he swindled you out of!"

Ferrowe appeared uncomfortable. "You have looked up the case. Well, what is twelve thousand pounds, three years ago?"

"People can feel very sore over less than that."

"I felt sore," said Ferrowe, "but I have had time to get over it. His murder doesn't bring the money back, does it?"

He was asked a few more questions and then Miller was interviewed. He practically repeated Ferrowe's story, but gave one fresh piece of information. Goff asked him to say what exactly happened in the short time he was alone with Rolls.

"He came out of the bar and tidied one or two things. Then he stood at the window and said he hoped there wouldn't be much rain. His wife and her son had gone to the pictures, but they were in an open car, and he didn't want her to get wet."

"Where was he when you went?"

"Still at the window."

"If Mr. Ferrowe came back to the door to look for you, would he have seen him?"

"Not if he was still at the window," said Miller.

There was a brief interview with Norton and Benting, but as their extreme moderation kept them both from the bar they had nothing new to tell. Neither had seen any one in the club-house except their own companions and Provost.

"Well, Mr. Bennion," said Goff, "we have now got Rolls into the lounge, more or less at the spot where he was killed. It was a few minutes after five, and if there is anything in your cold pipe theory it was just about then that the blows were struck."

"I think that is so," agreed Roger.

"And we narrow the suspects down to three," put in Beard.

"Who would they be?" asked Gwyer.

"Ferrowe, Miller and Bardwell. We know by their own story that Miller and Ferrowe could have done it, and by Mr. Bennion's chart Bardwell was the only one of the card party to come out soon after five o'clock."

"Oxley and Korwood came out," said Roger; "but that was later. Oxley at about five twenty-five, Korwood just before the half-hour."

"I don't know how the cold pipe story would appeal to a jury," pronounced Goff; "but I agree with Beard that the case narrows itself down to Ferrowe, Miller and Bardwell. Each of them was present in almost exact circumstances at the time of both the crimes. I should eliminate Miller as, so far, we have nothing to show that he knew anything of Denton. As to Ferrowe, it was curious that he should slip back on both occasions, but we should not have known it had he not told us. He is a business man, and the rankle of a three-years' old lawsuit is hardly an adequate motive for murder. Bardwell is different."

"I agreed," nodded Beard.

"Bardwell," proceeded Goff, "hated Denton because of his affair with Miss Venne and he took the surest means of preventing its renewal. Rather clumsily he tried to find out if Rolls knew more than he had told us. He attempted bribery. He offered twenty pounds—a ridiculous sum if Rolls had really seen anything. But to offer more might have been too much of an admission. Rolls may have been waiting his time, or he may have named his price."

"Rolls was no blackmailer," declared Gwyer.

"Maybe not," shrugged Goff, "but Bardwell was taking no chances. From what we know now he was the only person with an adequate motive who could have killed Denton and who was on the spot at the exact moment, and could also have killed Rolls."

"I'll apply for a warrant," suggested Beard.

"Before you do that I want to trace the pistol to him. I have inquired at his home and so far as is known he had no pistol there. If he had, I do not suppose he would have brought it here. Therefore, he must have got it locally. I want you to have inquiries made at all the shops in the towns in the vicinity where firearms can be procured, first-hand or second-hand. There cannot be a great number and it must have been during the middle of last week."

"I have his photograph," nodded Beard. "I felt all along that he was our man."

"What do you think of this, Mr. Bennion?" inquired Major Gwyer.

"I think Inspector Goff is right in trying to trace the weapon, though I doubt if the result will be as he anticipates. I hope he will catch the man who used the poker."

"I am with you there," said Gwyer. "I do not believe that Rolls——"

He did not finish. The door opened and one of the club members came in, a man Roger knew by sight.

"I was told you were here," he said to the inspectors. "Didn't expect to see you, Gwyer; but you can confirm what I say—unless you have already told them. They ought to know about it. The fact is"—he picked out Goff and addressed him—"the fact is, Rolls was a thief."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

ROLLS ACCUSED

"Who is this?" demanded Goff. "What does he mean?"

"This is Captain Winton," said Gwyer, "a member of our committee."

"I mean," added Winton, "that Rolls's death was probably the result of his own wrong-doing."

Winton was a slight man with a fiery complexion and prominent blue eyes. A sailor of the now old-fashioned and explosive type. He always spoke loudly.

"Rolls was murdered," remarked Beard. "He did not kill himself. We have to find out who killed him."

"Probably an accomplice," shouted Winton. "They fell out over dividing the swag as likely as not. Rolls was a thief and when I hear of sympathy and subscription lists it is time the truth was known."

The two inspectors looked at one another. They were not quite sure how far these accusations concerned them. No charge could now be made against the dead steward, even if he had been

unfaithful. They were not at that moment considering the domestic affairs of the club.

"What can you tell us about this, sir?" Goff put the question to Gwyer.

"He knows," interrupted Winton in his quarter-deck voice. "I gave him the facts days ago. Put into a nutshell, Rolls had been helping himself. His cash and the stock don't tally. I'm on the house committee and I found it out."

"Is this true?" asked Goff.

"It is true that Captain Winton made statements to me to that effect. They were supported by what looked like proof, but I thought there must be some mistake. As I told you just now, I have known Rolls for a good many years and I have always found him worthy of trust. The committee meets at the end of this week and I suggested that Captain Winton should tell them of his discoveries, and we would ask Rolls for his explanation."

Gwyer spoke with his usual quiet dignity. It contrasted strangely with the strident tones of his colleague.

"Did you charge Rolls with it?" demanded Winton.

"I did not. We were in the heat of this inquiry about the death of Hugh Denton and the inquest was imminent. I thought it better not to start a new investigation until things had become more normal. You said the irregularities dated back for months, so the delay of a few days could not affect matters. I did not want our little affairs to clash with yours."

The last remark was to Goff. "I quite understand," he nodded.

"You did not charge him," snorted Winton, "but I did!"

"You *charged* him before the matter had been considered in committee?" asked Gwyer, his quiet tone carrying condemnation.

"I asked for his explanation. I said if he could clear it up, it might not go before the committee. I knew he couldn't."

"What was his reply?" inquired Goff.

"He asked for time to think it over."

"He did not admit he had done wrong?" queried Gwyer.

"He didn't deny it!" retorted Winton. "It was impossible. It spoke for itself."

"When did you see him about it?"

"On Monday."

"That was the day before the inquest?" asked Goff.

"Yes. The inquest was nothing to do with us; this was. I gave him a fair chance to explain it, didn't I?"

"You never liked him," said Gwyer quietly. "You had your own candidate for the job and were annoyed when Rolls got it."

"I thought he was too old and too fat," shouted Winton. "If I didn't like him, this proves I was right, doesn't it?"

He threw on the table a list of the purchases of wines and spirits for a considerable period. Allowing for the cash received, the stock in hand was far less than it should have been. If the figures were correct, the discrepancy was substantial. For some moments Goff and Beard conferred in an undertone.

"I think we had better see Mrs. Rolls," pronounced the former.

"Why?" demanded Gwyer. "The poor woman has just had the shock of her husband's death. It is your job to find out how and why he died. To badger

her about accounts, and with the suggestion that he was dishonest, is hardly human. If there is any defalcation, it is for the committee of the club to ascertain the facts and to decide what shall be done about it. As captain of the club I say you have no authority to interfere. Winton's action is grossly improper, but I will also say this—if there proves to be a shortage I will make it good myself rather than have Mrs. Rolls troubled at the present time."

Never before had Roger heard him speak so warmly. The inspectors were taken aback and Winton spluttered. It was some moments before Goff replied.

"I appreciate your feeling, sir," he said, "but you have rather misunderstood our intention. We are bound in any event to see Mrs. Rolls. Our view is that her husband's death is connected with Denton's death. If that is so, your accounts do not come into the matter."

"Then you will not question her on the subject?"

"Not unless our views are wrong and there is evidence that Rolls was working with an accomplice who may have fallen out with him, as this gentleman suggests."

"I understand," said Gwyer. "I do not want to obstruct you in the execution of your duty. But I say again I believe Rolls would have cleared up this matter had he been afforded a proper opportunity."

Goff directed an assistant who was there taking notes to call Mrs. Rolls.

"We shall not want you any more," he added to Captain Winton.

When Mrs. Rolls entered, Major Gwyer got up and shook her by the hand and led her to a chair.

"You know how terribly sorry I am," he said gently, "but you must help us in any way you can."

We want to get at the truth and discover who was responsible for this terrible crime."

"Yes, sir."

She had been crying, but she faced them as bravely as she could. A poor, pathetic, little figure, in her black dress.

"Mrs. Rolls," began Goff in his most soothing manner, "we know what a shock this has been for you, but there are a few questions I must ask. Had your husband to your knowledge any enemies?"

"Oh, no, sir. He was the kindest man. Every one liked him."

"Can you suggest any reason why he was attacked?"

"No, sir." The tears came again, but she tried to keep them back.

"Nor who attacked him?"

"No, sir."

"Had he been worried lately?"

"You mean about Mr. Denton, sir? It worried him a lot."

"He made no statement to you about it? Whether he suspected any one, or anything like that?"

"No, sir. He said we had best not talk about it."

"Did he seem to get more worried afterwards—say on Monday?"

"I don't think so, sir. He was very quiet. But he was never one to talk a lot."

"So far as you know he was quite happy in his work here?"

"Oh, yes. He loved it. He said he could never thank the Major enough for getting him the job."

"He never hinted at any trouble—on Monday or yesterday?"

"No, sir."

There was no doubt as to her sincerity. Whatever had passed between Rolls and Captain Winton had been kept from her.

"Yesterday afternoon you went to the pictures?"

"Yes, sir. I wouldn't have gone if I had thought——" The tears came again.

"You went with your son?"

"Yes, sir. Jim took me."

"You were together all the afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sitting side by side, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. At least, not exactly. There was only one seat in the front row, so Jim put me there and sat behind. He is very good to me."

"And he brought you home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was your husband often left alone like that?"

"Oh, no, sir. We don't go out a lot. But sometimes when Jim is here he gives me a little treat."

"Your son was away last week?"

"Yes, sir."

"How often is he here?"

"Between his voyages, sir. He has been trying to get another job."

"I see. Now, Mrs. Rolls, I will tell you what is in our mind. When Mr. Denton was killed your husband might have seen or suspected more than he told us. That might have led the person he saw or suspected to attack him. Do you think that is possible?"

"I—I don't know, sir." Again the tears came.

"I suppose," put in Major Gwyer gently, "you do not really know what your husband did tell these police gentlemen?"

"No, sir. I don't. But he told the truth. I am sure of that. He always did."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rolls. That is all."

Goff dismissed her, but Roger asked if he might put a question.

"Did you and your husband do all the work here?"

"There is a woman who comes in the morning, sir, to do the scrubbing and that sort of thing."

"What time does she leave?"

"About half-past one, sir. After dinner."

"Would you give me her name and address?"

"Mrs. Egan, sir, of Bay Cottage."

"Thank you. Did Mrs. Egan know that you and your son were going to the pictures?"

"Yes, sir. We arranged it during the morning."

"Would any one else know that your husband would be here alone?"

"I—I don't think so, sir."

"Mrs. Rolls"—Gwyer took up the running—"do you think it possible that someone attacked your husband hoping to get away with money or valuables?"

"I—I thought of that, sir, but they say nothing is gone, and there are generally the gentlemen in and out."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rolls."

She went, and Gwyer turned to Goff.

"You were tactful, Inspector, and I thank you for it. Rolls was devoted to her and if Winton threatened trouble for him I think he would have kept it from her as long as possible."

"It looks that way," muttered Goff; "but it doesn't help us much. I think we will see the son."

Jim Weston stood smartly at the end of the table and answered the questions put to him without hesitation. His story confirmed that told by his

mother, but with him Goff was a little more definite in one matter than he had been with her.

"Had you any reason to suspect that your stepfather was worried about the club accounts?"

"I don't think so, sir. At least——" Jim hesitated.

"Well?"

"I heard him say once or twice that he wished he understood book-keeping better. You see, sir, he had never been brought up to it."

"When did he say that?"

"I couldn't give it a date, sir. From time to time. I asked if I could help him. But he wouldn't let me."

"Why not?"

"In a way, sir, I suppose he was too proud."

"Did he make any special reference to it on Monday or yesterday?"

"Oh, no, sir. Not then. I meant weeks ago."

"Now, Weston," said Goff gravely, "your stepfather was murdered. You must have some idea in your mind to account for it. What do you really think about it?"

"It beats me, sir," replied Jim, shaking his head. "That gentleman was killed while I was away last week, and Rolls thought—but perhaps I oughtn't to say it."

"Go on. There is no harm in your telling us."

"Rolls thought—at least, he seemed to think—that one of the gentlemen in the card-room was concerned. And of course it was the same gentlemen that was there yesterday and just at the same time of day."

Gwyer made a gesture of impatience. "Did Rolls tell you he suspected one of those men?" he asked. "Or did you surmise it?"

"Well, sir," replied Jim, "it seemed that way, but he never saw anything definite."

Gwyer turned to Goff. "Surely Weston's fancy of what may have been Rolls's fancy is not evidence?"

"We are not exactly taking evidence," said Goff. "It may help to show us where to look for it."

They asked him a few more questions and while they were so engaged Roger slipped out of the room to do a bit of pocket-picking. It was an odd chance, but it might come off.

Apparently it did. On a hook at the back of the bar a raincoat was hanging. In one of the pockets Roger found two small scraps of paper. They seemed to interest him very considerably. He put them in his own pocket and returned to the card-room.

"You are managing all right, Weston?" he heard Gwyer say.

"Yes, sir. It is very easy for me as I've done most of it before, and my mother is so wonderful."

"Well, carry on for the present and save her all you can."

"I will, sir."

"Captain Winton's discoveries do not seem to have cut much ice," remarked Beard, when Jim had gone.

"Whatever he may have said to Rolls, it is pretty clear Rolls kept to himself."

"We are where we started," agreed Goff. "I want to trace the weapon to Bardwell and that will close the case."

"I'll send two good men round the shops," said Beard, "and I'll do some of them myself."

"And I," thought Roger, "will look elsewhere."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

ROGER GETS BUSY

OUTSIDE the club-house Roger met Vickie Venne. He rather thought she had been waiting for him. As usual, she was smartly turned out, but there was no disguising the anxiety in her eyes.

"This is terrible about Rolls," she said. "Have they found out who killed him?"

"Not yet, I am afraid."

"Do you know what every one is saying?"

"I don't," answered Roger; "but who do you mean by every one?"

"The members of the club. I have seen a lot of them this morning. They are furious at Rolls being set on like that; he was very popular. They didn't care so much about Hugh Denton—he was a stranger. But now they are saying that the same person must have killed them both and that it must be one of that four from Wandleton Park. No one else knew Hugh Denton."

"And why did the man from Wandleton Park kill Rolls?"

"Because he knew—or suspected—too much."

"Yes," agreed Roger, "that does seem the ready-made conclusion."

"It is what they are all saying. You do not believe it?"

There was eagerness, urgency in her question. There was no doubt of the agony of mind she had suffered. If one of that four were guilty she knew on whom the suspicion must fall!

"To disbelieve it one must be able to supply an equally credible alternative. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I can! I heard last night what had happened and I never slept for thinking about it. Why should the two crimes be connected? Rolls killed Hugh Denton. I don't know why, but it was easier for him than for any one else and with such a man as Hugh there might be a score of motives."

"Then who killed Rolls?"

"Someone from outside. A thief, perhaps. Or someone we know nothing about. Rolls may have had enemies before he came here."

She spoke quickly, earnestly; almost as though imploring him to believe her. She was far more desirous of showing who was not guilty than who was.

"That is all possible," said Roger; "but in neither case are you showing any motive. It is the job of the police to sift the facts and build up the whole story."

"They find a story that suits them," she cried, "and that is good enough!"

"No. They are looking for proof, and nothing short of proof will satisfy them. Have you seen Bardwell?"

"He avoids me. Is it quite fair?"

They had walked down the path to where she had left her car. For a moment they stood beside it. He did not answer her question and with slightly heightened colour she put another.

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. Bennion?"

"The answer to that"—he smiled—"is either many times, or never. I suppose they mean the same."

"If you loved a girl and she told you that a year before you met she had done what I did—would it kill your love for her?"

"My dear, you must be patient. Remember all this has happened in abnormal circumstances. Bardwell knows he is suspected just as well as you do. He hated Denton and Denton was killed. He wants to see the matter cleared up."

"If he came to me we could fight together—if he wanted me. You see, you did not answer my question."

"Which question?"

"What would you do yourself? Are men always so blameless? Does one mistake make all that difference?"

She spoke more passionately than ever before. She loved Bardwell; she would fight for him; but she feared she had lost him. Roger tried to take a lighter tone.

"That, my dear, sounds like three questions, and probably I could talk for quite a long time about all of them. But speaking in my most grandfatherly manner I can only say be patient, be a good girl, and all will come right in the end."

"You really believe that?"

"I do."

"Thank you." She paused a moment, then she added, "A girl is a fool to do what I did. She never feels the same to herself. When you meet the right one, I hope she will never let you down—afterwards or before."

Roger then hurried off to see Mrs. Egan. She was a sturdy middle-aged woman, but her morning's work was strenuous and she generally allowed herself a nap in the afternoon. Luckily her siesta was finished when he arrived.

"Yes," she said in reply to his questions, "I worked for Mr. Rolls, and I knew Mrs. Rolls and her son were going to the pictures."

"Mr. and Mrs. Rolls were happy together?"

"Indeed they were. He was a good man and I hope they catch the devil that hit him so cruel."

"He had no enemies that you knew of?"

"I never heard any one say a bad word about him."

"And what," asked Roger, "do you think of his stepson?"

"Not much. His mother thinks the world of him. Mothers do. But Jim Weston is a bad one. He'll find trouble some day."

"How did he get on with Mr. Rolls?"

Mrs. Egan grimaced. "Mr. Rolls did his best with him for his mother's sake, but if you ask me, he knew what he was."

"What was he? What were his failings?"

"Same as most young fellows nowadays, seems to me. Drinking, gambling, running after the girls, and afraid of work."

"His stepfather disapproved?"

"He tried to keep him steady, but what Jim Weston wanted was to live easy and do nothing."

"You did not like him?" suggested Roger.

"I knew what he was," said Mrs. Egan.

"Did you ever hear him and his stepfather quarrel? Did they have words?"

"That they did. Often enough."

"Recently?"

"If yesterday is recent."

"What happened yesterday?" asked Roger.

"There was a fair rumpus before Mr. Rolls went to that inquest. I couldn't hear all that was said, but he told Jim Weston it would break his mother's heart when she knew. And Jim said, don't tell her; he'd make it all right."

"That was before he took his mother to the pictures?"

"That's right ; in the morning. He was good to her—*she* thought—just because he took her out sometimes. He knew how to get round her."

"You do not know what this rumpus was about ? "

"No. They stopped soon as they saw me."

"It was yesterday morning, and Rolls said it would break the mother's heart when she knew about it—you are quite sure of that ? "

"As sure as I'm sitting here," declared Mrs. Egan.

"Thank you," said Roger. "It may be important, so please remember it just as you have told it to me."

"I shan't forget," she said grimly.

Roger's next call was at the cinema. It was one of the Palace chain of picture houses and he knew the chairman of the company, Sir John Spells. The mention of that powerful name assured the prompt attention of the local manager.

"These are the halves of tickets issued by you, aren't they ? " asked Roger. He produced two scraps of thin red card, one about twice as long as the other.

"They are. We give the tickets at the pay-box and the attendant at the door tears them in half as the people pass in."

"I see they are all numbered. This bit is the half of two tickets, Nos. 79698 and 79699. That would mean two people went in together ? "

"That's right. The tickets are on a roll."

"I know," said Roger. "I am a pretty frequent visitor myself. Now this other bit is No. 79921. That is of course for only one person ? "

"Yes."

"Is it possible to tell approximately the time at which these tickets were issued ? "

"Quite easy," said the manager. "We always note the number on the roll when the house opens

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and we know when we start a new roll. That roll ended on 80,000. These I think, were issued yesterday."

"Can you make sure?"

"Certainly, sir."

He was away for a few minutes only.

"These two were taken soon after we opened at two o'clock yesterday. Probably about two-thirty. The single one would have been taken later in the afternoon, probably about half-past five. We put in the new roll something before six."

"Thank you," said Roger. "If these three half-tickets were found in one person's pocket, what is a fair conclusion to draw?"

"I don't quite understand. No one pays to see a show twice on the same afternoon."

"Not in an ordinary way. But if someone came with a friend at two-thirty and then for some reason went out and came back after five, they would have to pay again?"

"I see what you mean," said the manager. "Yes, they would. We can't readmit on a half-ticket, or we should have all sorts of tricks played on us."

"How long does your programme last?"

"Three hours."

"So any one starting at half-past two would stay till half-past five to get a complete round?"

"That's right. Of course they could stay longer if they liked."

"Thanks very much. You might get your assistant to make a special note of the day and time when these tickets were issued."

"Anything serious, sir?"

"It may be," said Roger.

It was. But it was now for Goff to handle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE MEANS

WHEN Roger joined his friends at dinner he found them deep in a golf wrangle. Korwood had played Oxley, and there had been the inevitable incident that had to be argued out afterwards.

"He was two up and three to play," Korwood was saying. "On the sixteenth green I laid him a dead stymie and he had that for a half. He took his niblick, but before playing the shot he put his handkerchief into the hole so that, if the ball pitched in, it would not be likely to bounce out again."

"What happened?" asked Provost.

"He pitched in and stayed there and claimed the half. I say he forfeited the hole."

"Show me the rule that says so," challenged Oxley.

"Precious few of us know the rules," remarked Bardwell; "but I've never heard of that being done before. I think it must be wrong."

"Of course it is wrong," said Korwood warmly. "You might as well claim to roll your handkerchief into a rope and lay it just beyond the pin so that, if the ball missed, it shouldn't go far past. And if your handkerchief, why not an umbrella?"

"The rule," observed Provost, "says that the hole must be not less than four inches deep. Did the handkerchief make it less than that?"

"No," said Oxley. "I was careful to see it didn't."

"But why did you do it?" asked Bardwell.

"I had a ball bounce out from just such a shot a few days ago."

"He did it to fluster me," declared Korwood, perhaps with some justification. "He knew it would put me off my game. What do you think about it, Bennion?"

"I have never known a ball bounce out," said Roger, but is his handkerchief part of his person?"

"Yes," said Korwood.

"No," said Oxley.

"What is the point?" asked Bardwell.

"If his ball hits himself, his partner or his caddy, he loses the hole."

"You can't argue that I was at the bottom of the hole!" cried Oxley.

"Indeed we can!" said Korwood. "When the rule talks of the ball hitting you, it means your clothes. Your handkerchief is part of your clothing and therefore part of you. So it was my hole."

He was so excited at this proof of his contention that the others had to laugh.

"What happened after that?" inquired Roger.

"I won both the last two holes," said Oxley, "so it was my game, anyhow."

"That was because I was so annoyed," protested Korwood. "We ought to play it all over again."

"I think we must award the hole to Korwood, but the match to Oxley," pronounced Provost.

"It doesn't much matter," Korwood consoled himself. "We are out of it anyhow."

"What are the points to date?" asked Roger.

"You and Provost are five games each, with two to play," said Oxley. "I am five, but I have finished."

"Then there might be three of us with five each?"

"Impossible," said Korwood. "You have to play Bardwell and Provost, and Provost has to play me and you. When you meet Provost one of you must

win. You might tie at six each, but, anyway, you beat Oxley. Thank heaven for that!"

Again they all laughed, but Oxley was not quite done.

"We have decided it must be ended to-morrow," he said, "as Bardwell wants to get away. So if Bennion is busy on his sleuthing, he is scratched and his games don't count. Then if Korwood beats Provost, Provost and I are five all."

"Must you be going?" Roger asked Bardwell.

"Yes. I only came for a fortnight."

Roger wondered if he would be allowed to go. Did he fail to realise the interest that Goff and Beard had in him? But he did not hint at such a thing.

"I can play both my games to-morrow," he said.

"Good!" cried Korwood. "You play Bardwell in the morning and I play Provost. Then you meet Provost in the afternoon."

"That will suit me," said Roger.

"Finished with sleuthing?" asked Provost.

"For the present."

"What about the police? Are we to expect an arrest?"

"They think they are near the end," said Roger.

"There is just one thing wanting."

"What is that?" asked Bardwell.

"The means."

"What means?"

"The means whereby the victim was killed. In every crime there are three things they look for; motive, opportunity, and means. The motive does not necessarily concern them. It is often the biggest factor, yet it might be a secret they could never discover. But they must be able to show opportunity and they must be able to show means. In a poisoning case, for instance, it is necessary to prove that the

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accused had or could have had access to the drug used."

"Where are they stuck here?" asked Korwood.

"There is no difficulty as to the motive or the opportunity, but they want to show that the man they suspect had the means—a gun."

As he said this, Roger was watching Bardwell. His expression showed interest but not fear.

"That would only account for Denton," remarked Provost.

"And if the gun was thrown into the sea," Korwood added, "they are done."

"Not quite. So far as Rolls is concerned, the means—the poker—presents no difficulty. In Denton's case it is known what sort of gun was used and if they can show that their suspect had or procured just that kind of weapon, that may be good enough, even if the weapon has been disposed of."

"Let us wish them luck of it," yawned Oxley.

Roger spent some time that evening with Inspector Goff. He gave him the information he had gleaned and he learned in return that the search of the gun shops had so far been without result. Neither he nor Goff was to know that the greatest detective of all, Sergeant Chance, was about to come to their aid.

The games the next morning started in good time, Roger getting off first with Bardwell. It was a queer experience to be playing a man who might at any moment on the round be stopped and hurried away on a charge of murder! Roger knew that what he had told Goff had not altered the inspector's ideas as to the Denton crime. He could only hope that fear, if unjustified, would not upset his opponent's play.

Be that as it may, Bardwell failed to do himself justice. The game was without notable incident.

Roger was steady and that, despite the liberal allowance of bisques, proved good enough. But seldom had a round been accomplished in such deadly silence. Roger did not mean to be the first to talk, and it was not until the long ninth hole that his companion burst forth, as though unable to control himself any longer.

"Did you mean last night that until they trace the gun it will never be known who killed Denton and Rolls?"

"Rolls was not shot. As to Denton, what I said was that they must be able to show reasonable grounds for supposing the person they suspect had or could have had a gun."

"Failing that the matter can never be cleared up?"

"Failing that," said Roger, "I do not think it can."

"And so the suspicion of being a murderer will cling for ever to the person they pitch on?"

Bardwell's tone told of the strain he was under. It was not surprising that his game suffered.

"What the police think is not known to the world at large," said Roger. "They never bring a charge until they are convinced it can be proved."

There was another long spell of silence, except for the terse comments the play entails. In fact, it was not until Roger had won the match that he broke it.

"Care to play the last four holes?" he asked.

"May as well," said Bardwell.

"I saw Miss Venne yesterday," Roger remarked casually after they had driven off. "The thing seemed to have worried her a lot. And she is very distressed about Rolls."

"I suppose so." Bardwell said nothing more, and it was not easy to pursue the subject.

"Leaving early to-morrow?" Roger asked a little later.

"Yes. Or possibly to-night."

Roger had offered him a stroke a hole for the bye. "What does it matter?" had been Bardwell's reply. There was no doubt that in his state of mind very little mattered just then—or it mattered so much that the game became a farce.

"Well, how did it end?"

They were met at the entrance of the club-house by Major Gwyer. He knew all about their contest and had taken quite an interest in it.

"He let me beat him," said Roger.

"Does that make you the winner?"

"No. Provost is behind, playing Korwood. If he wins, as I expect he will, he and I fight it out this afternoon."

"Should be worth watching," said Gwyer.

They turned to the dressing-room. Just inside the entrance a man was impatiently shaking the door of a locker.

"Why, Webber," exclaimed Gwyer, "you back? I was told you had gone south for the winter."

"I had, but there was illness in the family. My wife's mother. So we returned. And you have been doing pretty ghastly things while I was away."

There was a note of irritation in his voice. He had bright eyes, a high colour, a slightly curved nose and rather a prominent chin. He would have caricatured as Mr. Punch.

"You heard about poor Rolls?" said Gwyer quietly.

"I did. And about that other fellow. Like a fool I left my clubs in my locker and the key in the lock. The key has gone. As like as not the clubs will be gone too!"

He sounded more concerned about his clubs than about the tragedies that had happened in his absence.

"Would my key fit?" asked Roger.

"I don't suppose so. I've tried a dozen, but they are all different. That fellow Weston is getting a long screwdriver or something to force the door. Might try, though."

They did try, but were not successful. Then Jim Weston brought his tool and with a quick wrench the door was open. The lock was only a flimsy affair.

"Ha! Clubs all right," said Webber, as he lifted out the bag. "What is that?"

Roger, Gwyer, Jim Weston, Bardwell, Webber—they all saw it. On the floor of his little cupboard lay a small revolver half-wrapped in a handkerchief.

"Not mine," muttered Webber, as he stooped to pick it up.

"Don't touch it!" cried Roger. "It may be what the police are looking for!"

"But how could it get into my locker?"

To that no answer was necessary.

"I think," said Roger, "some of us had better stay here to see that no one interferes with it. If it is not yours, it may want a lot of explaining."

"What should we do about it?" asked Gwyer.

"Weston had better telephone for Goff or Beard. The sooner they take charge of it the better."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE FINAL GAME

It was not surprising that the final between Provost and Roger Bennion—for Korwood had been duly beaten after a stout fight—should be followed by their three fellow-competitors, but it was hardly to be expected that so many of the members of the club would turn out to watch the event.

When the opponents reached the first tee they found at least a score of onlookers waiting for them, and others swelled the number as the round progressed. But keen as the Allingham players were on the game, it would be a mistake to suppose that they were there solely to see which of a little group of visitors would win a contest limited to their own number. The fact was that the news of the discovery of the revolver in Webber's locker had spread very rapidly and every one was convinced that it would lead to an immediate solution of the two murder mysteries. Public opinion had already decided that the person responsible for the death of Hugh Denton must be one of his fellow-clubmen, and only a visitor could have killed such a decent and well-liked fellow as Fred Rolls. Rumour—sometimes ahead of the facts—said that an arrest was to be made, and it was the desire to see the dramatic end of their troubles rather than the hope of witnessing good golf that made many of them miss their afternoon nap.

The finding of the weapon had been discussed at the hotel lunch table and none of Roger's friends appeared to regret its discovery.

"What on earth made the fellow put it there?" asked Korwood. "It was bound to be discovered as soon as the other chap went for his clubs."

"Suppose you had shot Denton," began Roger.

"I refuse to suppose anything of the kind!"

"Suppose then that any one of us had done it, our idea might be to get rid of the weapon as quickly as possible. That locker would be out of the view of the carpenters who were hammering away the other side of the room."

"Ought not the police to have searched the lockers?" queried Oxley.

"No doubt they could have got an order to do so, but, as it happened, it was put in the locker of a man who was away and the key was removed. It was a cunning idea really, because no one would expect the weapon to be left so near to the scene of the crime, or in the closed locker of an absent member. It was assumed that the murderer had taken it away, probably to throw it into the sea."

"I guess he now wishes he had," said Korwood.

"Exactly how much forwarder are they by finding the weapon?" asked Provost, in his quiet practical way.

"Fingerprints," suggested Oxley.

"That is not likely," said Bardwell. "It was wrapped in a handkerchief, which means it had been wiped."

"A name or laundry mark on the handkerchief," hinted Korwood.

"Would the fellow who planned the whole thing and took the trouble to wipe the fingerprints leave an identifiable handkerchief?" questioned Provost.

"He might, of course. They say criminals always make mistakes, but I should hardly think he would be as silly as that."

"The first thing they have to establish," said Roger, "is that the weapon found is actually the one that shot Denton. We all suppose it was, but they have to make sure. As they have the bullet they can of course do that."

"How?" asked Bardwell.

"The science of ballistics shows that bullets fired through that barrel bear markings no other barrel would leave."

"Then what?" asked Provost.

"They have to find who owned—or bought—that revolver."

"So they are not really much nearer than they were?"

Roger did not reply. Korwood did not give him time.

"I have always wondered about Rolls," he said. "He had the best chance of shooting Denton, and he was the only person who could not get away. He would know his rooms might be searched, so he would put the gun in one of the members' lockers."

"Then who killed Rolls?" asked Oxley.

To that there was no reply, though the matter was discussed again from many angles. A little later Roger put a question to Bardwell.

"Are you still thinking of leaving to-night?"

"No," was the reply. "Nor to-morrow, if you think this means the affair will really be cleared up."

"I am almost sure of it," said Roger.

They were surprised at the audience that was waiting for the match to begin. Ferrowe was there with Benting, but Miller and Norton had not come. A few ladies were present, among them the vivacious Winnie Gainer, but Vickie Venne was not to be seen. Major Gwyer and his brother witnessed the start, but did not propose to walk round.

Whether or not the company was interested in keen golf, they got it. Provost, who was to receive three bisques and played with only four clubs, was his usual imperturbable self ; while Roger Bennion was one of those fortunate individuals who can play their best at a time of crisis. Oxley wanted to add to the interest by having bets on the result.

"I'll bet you a level half-crown on Provost," he said to Korwood.

"No," said Korwood. "If I bet, I am on Provost too."

"What about you?" he asked Ferrowe, with whom he had a nodding acquaintance.

"I don't know their play well enough," replied Chu Chin Chow cautiously.

Provost took the first three holes. His two at the short second was a bit lucky, but the others were perfectly played. Roger was one too many each time.

"What about it now?" Oxley asked.

"What odds do you offer?" Ferrowe wanted to know. "Your man is three up with three bisques in hand!"

"Two to one—in half-crowns."

"Two to one! It should be four to one."

"I'll make it three," said Oxley.

"All right," said Ferrowe. "I'll take it."

Then things began to go Roger's way. He was hitting the ball very sweetly and at the turn he was only one down with two bisques gone. Most if not all of the onlookers began to forget about possible police interference. They were seeing good golf, and the match was exciting.

The tenth and eleventh were halved in par figures, but at the twelfth Roger got a four and Provost took five. That wiped out the last bisque.

Then as they moved to the thirteenth tee there was

a sensation. A policeman in uniform came running over the hill to meet them !

Every one stood still, waiting to see who was to be arrested ! There was a strange hush as the man came up. He made straight for Roger. He whispered a few words and then hurried away as quickly as he had come. It seemed an anti-climax, yet it reminded every one of the end they were expecting.

“ Anything serious ? ” asked Provost.

“ It would have kept,” said Roger.

No one else questioned him, but there were many guesses as to what it was about. Had Goff been a golfer perhaps he would have waited. Such an interruption at such a time might upset any player and Roger was only human. He was off the course at both the next holes, and Provost was again two up, with only four to play. And Roger had learnt how important it was that he should win !

He steadied himself and halved the fifteenth in four. Provost was playing beautifully. At the sixteenth, the short “ donkey-drop,” Provost was nicely on the green, but Roger put his shot beside the pin. A two was good enough ! He also won the long seventeenth. All square and one to play !

And as the company moved to the eighteenth tee they saw Inspector Goff and Inspector Beard waiting for them at the edge of the last green. Had either of the players been troubled with an evil conscience they could hardly have addressed the ball ! Many perhaps of the onlookers thought that the game and the mystery that so concerned them would be settled at the same dramatic moment.

It was the hole that Korwood had done in one—and lost ! There was a carry of two hundred yards over a valley to a tee cut in the hillside below the club-house. Bunkers to catch the topped shot ;

bunkers to trap the pull or the slice ; bunkers in the slopes above and below the green. A very simple hole—if you hit the ball aright. A cruel one if you did not.

In tense silence Roger took his stance. Slow back—and a perfect follow through. For how long the ball and the club were in actual contact none could say. The ball sailed clean and true to the green. It pitched just over the bunker and came to rest three yards past the pin. There was a low hum of approbation.

Then Provost played his shot. Equally cool, equally unhurried ; but not equally fortunate. Another yard and it would have landed just where Roger's had done. Being a little short, it hit the rising ground and fell back into the bunker.

But Provost was not yet finished. In grim silence they crossed the valley, drawing nearer to the waiting men on the opposite hill. He took his mashie—he never carried a niblick—and cut under the ball so that it rose in a cloud of sand, pitched close to the hole and rolled a bare foot past it.

There was a burst of applause. A three was certain and a halved hole meant starting again. But if Roger could sink his putt the game was his.

Not a sound was heard as he climbed on to the green. The officers of the law were motionless. He studied the line and then, with little delay, he hit the ball. Straight to the hole—but would it reach it ? On the very lip it seemed to stop. A quick breath from many who watched. It hesitated, then it rolled over—and in !

A shout of " Well played ! " Provost was the first with his congratulations. And Inspector Goff lumbered up.

" If it is as easy as that," he said, " I cannot think why people make such a fuss about it."

That was all! No arrest; no sensation. Again there was a feeling of anti-climax, perhaps of disappointment. Had the great detective only come to see the end of the game?

A babel of talk followed them to the club-house. Roger nodded to Goff, but did not speak. There were many handshakes and congratulations and the captain of the club, who had watched from the edge of the green, expressed the views of the whole company.

"I have never seen a finer finish," he said. "In nineteen cases out of twenty Provost would have saved it. His was a grand recovery, and your putt in the circumstances was wonderful."

"I was scared stiff," laughed Roger. "If I missed, we started again and he got three more bisques!"

"I never thought of that," said Provost. "Could I have used them all at the first hole? Rather an argument against them."

"Three half-crowns, please," Ferrowe murmured to Oxley.

"I'll toss you double or quits."

"Don't," advised Korwood. "He always wins."

"No," said Ferrowe, "I'll stick to what I've got. Come and have a drink."

A little later in the club-house Roger had a suggestion to make.

"It was understood," he said to Provost, "that the winner of your competition should entertain the other competitors. It might be difficult to find a date that suited us all when we get back to town. What about lunch here to-morrow? Possibly some of our friends could join us."

"Suit me all right," said Provost.

"Would you come, sir?" Roger asked Major Gwyer.

"I'd be very pleased."

"How about you and your three friends?" This was to Ferrowe.

"I'd love it," said Chu Chin Chow. "I can't answer for the others, but I will let them know and I don't doubt they will be here."

"Good," said Roger. "I'll 'phone Dr. Charlot and one or two more. We must make a real do of it."

Had he lost his match he would have had no victory to celebrate. Then the plan would have failed. A lot had hung on that putt!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

CELEBRATING THE VICTORY

HE was the life and soul of the party the night before it happened. So runs the advertisement of one of the preparations said to induce sound sleep. There are other ways of assuring the success of a party, and perhaps the most popular is to start it with plenty of cocktails. They may be bad for the digestion, but they loosen the tongue.

Roger saw that his friends had all they desired in that way, Major Gwyer being the only abstainer. Even young Norman Cross, who had returned in time to be present, took a perhaps regrettable interest in White Ladies.

It was a bachelor party. The host would have liked to have invited Vickie Venne and Winsome Winnie, but, as that would have meant getting other ladies also, it was a case of men only. The four from Wandleton Park, Ferrowe and his three friends, Dr.

Charlot, Webber, Hamilton and Green, Norman Cross and Major Gwyer. With Roger himself it made fifteen.

They sat at a long table, Roger at one end and the captain of the club at the other. Excellent fare was provided and the attendance was all that could be desired.

"I did not realise that the club could turn out a meal like this," said Provost, who sat on Roger's right.

"It is outside catering," explained his host. "We could not worry them here with poor Rolls gone."

"Short notice, wasn't it? Outside waiting too? I don't see Jim Weston."

"He is not here," said Roger. "These people are running it all."

And they ran it well. It was not an elaborate meal. Local lobsters, an excellent saddle of mutton, a variety of sweets, cheese and coffee. A sound brand of champagne and plenty of it. Then liqueur brandy.

Roger was a good host and the conversation was bright. Oxley, Ferrowe and Provost had stories to tell; not all new perhaps, but they were well received. Then someone commented on the fact that Provost had played with only four clubs, and an animated discussion ensued, very interesting to such a company.

"You might have won if you had carried more," said Charlot.

"I used to go out with ten," replied Provost. "I play better now than I did then."

"I saw a girl in the junior championship who had eighteen," remarked Korwood.

"Bringing her up wrong," declared Provost. "She should learn to use her clubs and not let the clubs use her."

"Buying the shots, they call it in America," said Gwyer.

"There was a man," said Oxley, "who played very slowly, but he always went out with twenty-two clubs, a spare pair of shoes, mackintosh trousers, an extra jacket, an umbrella and a packet of sandwiches. His caddy asked, 'Ain't you forgotten something, guv'nor?' 'I don't think so,' said the man; 'my flask is in my pocket.' 'What about the tent and the cookin' stove? Then we could stay the night.'"

They all laughed and Gwyer hoped the caddy was paid by the pound.

"It would undoubtedly be a greater trial of skill if the number of clubs was limited to six," said Bardwell.

"There is a girl who plays in championships who uses only one," remarked Ferrowe.

"And she generally knocks out a few of the stars," added Provost.

"The rules forbid the use of mechanical devices," said Roger, "but if you have eight irons exactly graded for the different carries it almost becomes a mechanical device."

"You still have to hit the ball!" said Charlot.

So they went on. Nearly every one had something to say about it. Then when the coffee and brandy came round, Provost stood up.

"You will not want a speech," he said, "but perhaps I ought to explain how this happy little gathering has been brought about. A few friends agreed with me that as the day seemed to be gone by when we could win competitions on our home course, we would hold one somewhere else, and by limiting the entry to our own number, one of us would at last have a new trophy for his sideboard.

So we came here. But one of our party failed us and in a weak moment we invited Mr. Bennion to take his place. We tried to handicap him out of all chance of winning, but you know what happened. We return to London, crushed, disappointed and embittered men."

There was laughter and some cries of, "No! No!"

"That is not quite true," Provost admitted. "We had many keen games and we thoroughly enjoyed them. We are satisfied that the best man won. He is celebrating his victory in a very sporting manner and I ask you to drink his health. Roger Bennion!"

There was applause and Major Gwyer was at once on his feet.

"If you will allow me," he said, "I should like to support that. I am glad the contest was held here and I would like to see more of such affairs. I am sometimes told that golfers are not so keen on competitions as they used to be. That the desire to hold a cup for a year, and to see one's name inscribed on it for all time, with the names of the players of the past and the future, is not so strong as when I was young. If that is true, I think it is to be regretted. I believe that competitions promote keenness, and keenness is essential for sport. Yesterday we saw a great finish to a great game and I associate myself with Mr. Provost in asking you to drink this toast. Mr. Roger Bennion."

It was drunk with acclamation. Roger sat there smiling as their glasses were raised to him, but he knew his most difficult task lay ahead. He stood up, hoping he was doing right.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I was fortunate to get such a welcome here from Mr. Provost and his friends and to be allowed to play in their competition. I was very lucky to win it for, as

you know, a single shot might have made all the difference. But, if you will allow me, there is something else I want to tell you."

He paused a moment and there was a tense silence as they listened for what was to come.

"We all know what has happened here in the past few days. We have been enjoying ourselves, yet the sense of tragedy has been hanging over us. To-day we have tactfully avoided it. Mr. Provost and Major Gwyer made no reference to it in their kind remarks about myself and I should be guilty of a sad breach of good taste if I alluded to it without good reason."

Again he stopped. There was no applause. There was hardly a movement. They waited for every word.

"This little luncheon has served a double purpose. Two men have been killed in this club-house and suspicion has fallen on a good many people. Most of those people are sitting at this table. It will, I hope, gratify you to know that the means now exist to prove the entire innocence of every one here."

There was a low murmur, perhaps of approval, perhaps of doubt. It soon died away.

"Hugh Denton was shot. The weapon that fired the fatal bullet was found two days ago in Mr. Webber's locker. And certain fingerprints were also found. This lunch of ours was arranged in conjunction with the police. As our plates and knives and forks have been taken away they have been labelled and they will be tested for fingerprints. The absence of prints identical with those already found will establish the innocence of us all. I hope you will believe me when I say I did not altogether welcome this method of investigation, but it seemed the quickest and surest way of achieving an end we must each desire."

Again there was silence. He still faced them, waiting perhaps for their condemnation.

"I thought," said Ferrowe, "it was illegal to take fingerprints without people's consent?"

"No," replied Roger, "it is often the best proof of their innocence. What is illegal is to put the fingerprints of innocent people on the police register. The police can always get what they want, but it may take a long time. This method was quick."

"You really mean," said Provost, "that there were fingerprints on that revolver? We were told there was a handkerchief that had been used to wipe them off."

"The fingerprints," said Roger slowly, "were not on the revolver but on the handkerchief."

"You can't have fingerprints on handkerchiefs!" cried Oxley. "This is a trick to make someone confess!"

"There are fingerprints on the handkerchief," repeated Roger.

"It cannot be true," said Ferrowe. He flourished his handkerchief and pressed his hands on it. "Look at the prints! Where are they?"

Most of the others were silent. They looked at Roger in a puzzled sort of way. Of course they would like the mystery to be cleared up, but handkerchiefs do not show fingerprints. That is common knowledge and experience. Some of them pressed their fingers on the tablecloth and the napkins. No marks were left. What purpose could be served by pretending otherwise?"

"A dirty finger might leave a smudge," muttered Korwood; "but I do not believe it would be identifiable."

"Science progresses," said Roger, in the same deliberate way as before. "The race between crime

and its detection continues and develops from year to year and day to day. The discovery that the human hand left prints on smooth hard surfaces—on furniture, bottles, paper and on weapons—even though they might be invisible to the naked eye, and that no two prints were identical, was an enormous gain to justice. But it soon became known. Newspapers told of it, story-books were full of it. So the criminal either wore gloves or was careful to wipe everything he touched. Detection was baffled. But there came a new development. Science has gone ahead again. We cannot see fingerprints on handkerchiefs, towels, cloth and the like, but they are there. I do not know that they have ever yet played a part in a murder case, anyway in this country. Perhaps this will be the first.”

“I don’t believe it,” muttered Oxley.

“Nor do I,” said Ferrowe.

“How is it possible?” asked Bardwell.

“Yes—how is it possible?” demanded several voices.

“Perhaps people do not fully understand how and why the fingers leave their marks,” said Roger. “It is not merely because of the pattern of the skin, but is due to perspiration which becomes the ink, so to speak, with which the pattern is printed. Soft materials take this ‘ink’ readily enough—especially perhaps as the criminal is likely to be in a nervous state that makes him perspire more freely than usual—but it needs chemicals to reveal it. It has been discovered that a solution of silver nitrate with a minute quantity of acetic acid is effective. The ultra-violet ray brings out the prints and they can be fixed to remain permanent.”

“Is this absolute fact?” asked Gwyer from the other end of the table.

"Absolute. Inspector Goff's messenger who interrupted us while we were playing yesterday came to tell me that tests had been made. The revolver Webber found in his locker had fired the shot that killed Denton, and there were identifiable prints on the handkerchief in which it was wrapped."

"So we were invited here to-day——" began Gwyer.

"To establish our innocence," said Roger.

"But if the marks found should have been made by one of us——?"

"That one," replied Roger quietly, "will know what to expect. It is perhaps better than waiting in ignorance for the action of the police."

Again there was quiet. A grim eerie hush. The old suspicions returned. Each looked uneasily at his neighbour. But Gwyer was again on his feet. His eyes seemed to regard all of them in turn. He drew himself up to his full height. Never before had his distinguished appearance been more impressive.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is the duty of each of us to do all he can to assist the cause of justice. Probably Mr. Bennion did not care for what he had to do, but he did it, and he was right. All of us—I repeat, *all* of us—may have reason to be grateful to him."

He paused a moment. There was a ripple of applause.

"I do not know if you are aware how late it is," he went on. "It is nearly three o'clock. I have another appointment and must be going. But before I go I would like you to drink that health again in another way." He poured a good quantity of the brandy he had previously refused into a glass and raised it aloft.

"To Mr. Bennion. A true sportsman."

He tossed off the drink and half-laughing, half-puzzled, the others followed his example. That broke up the party.

"Good-bye, Bennion," Gwyer said, shaking his hand. "I am glad that we met. I was writing a note for you to-day. You may soon be getting it."

With that he left the room and several of the others followed him out. A few remained talking. Suddenly there was a cry from Charlot who was standing by the window.

"My God! Look at Gwyer! He is running!"

They crowded to his side. Gwyer, who lived in one of the houses on the high ground overlooking the links, was hurrying as they had never seen him hurry before.

"It will kill him!" muttered the doctor, moving to the door. "What can he want? He must be stopped."

Even as the words were spoken, Gwyer stumbled. They saw his hat blow away, but bare-headed he struggled on. Then, suddenly, he collapsed. His tall figure lay absolutely still, his white hair gleaming in the sunshine.

"A very gallant gentleman," whispered Roger. "Unhappily a murderer!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE CUP WAS FULL

"You mean," said Dr. Charlot, "that Gwyer killed Denton?"

"I do," replied Roger.

"But why?"

"Did you know it all the time?"

"How did you find out?"

"Why did Gwyer kill Rolls?"

"I thought he was in Southampton?"

These questions and others followed one another in a swift fusillade. It was two hours since Major Gwyer had been seen to fall on the hillside approaching his house. Roger and his four friends were again in the card-room and Charlot and Ferrowe were with them.

Gwyer was dead before they reached him. A hurdle had been procured and he was carried to his home. A sad shock for his brother, for the two had lived together in perfect accord for many years.

"We knew it might happen at any time," said Ernest. "I wish I had been with him."

There was nothing to be done. They were all about to withdraw when the brother beckoned to Roger.

"I think he knew the end was near. He wrote a letter this morning and said you were to have it if anything happened to him. I will get it for you."

Most of those who had been at the luncheon party returned to their homes, but that little group went back to the club-house. Roger was able to read his letter before he joined them.

"I know that Gwyer threw away his life," said Charlot, "but I still fail to see why he should have killed Denton. As to his killing Rolls, I refuse to believe it."

"The two must go together," said Oxley.

"Perhaps Bennion will explain," suggested Provost.

"We made it harder for ourselves," said Roger, "than we need have done, by assuming, as Oxley just did, that the two crimes were connected. There was perhaps a connection, but not in the way supposed. I told Korwood it was really extremely rare, except in fiction, for one murder to be followed by another in the hope of avoiding suspicion. Obviously it would not lessen but would double the risk of detection."

"You mean," said Korwood, "Gwyer did not kill Rolls?"

"Certainly he did not. He was a hundred miles away at the time and Rolls's death grieved him very much."

"But why did he kill Denton?" asked Bardwell.

"And who did kill Rolls?" added Ferrowe.

"If they were distinct and different crimes," said Charlot, "can you deal with one at a time? I think we all want to get it clear."

The others murmured in agreement, and after a moment's pause Roger began.

"The murder of Rolls was a commonplace sordid crime committed by his stepson, Jim Weston."

"But he was at the pictures, with his mother," objected Ferrowe.

"Going to the pictures was his alibi, if one should be needed. But it failed. Some of you may not be aware that Rolls had been accused of robbing the till.

He realised at once that the guilty party could only be Jim Weston and he asked for time to look into the matter. He loved his wife and he knew she adored her boy. She would be heartbroken if that boy was sent to prison. Rolls, a simple, splendid fellow, hoped to find some way to avoid such a catastrophe. We can only guess what passed between him and his stepson. Possibly Jim made excuses ; probably he promised restitution. I think he begged Rolls not to tell his mother, but offered to take her to the pictures and said he would then tell her himself."

"But if he went to the pictures——" began Ferrowe again.

"He went, but he sat behind his mother, and that of course gave him the opportunity to slip out."

"But how do you know ?"

"I had doubts about Jim Weston from the first. He was plausible enough, but he told me he had been to London in the hope of signing on again in the *Atalanta Star*. No doubt he went to London, but hardly for that purpose. The *Atalanta Star* began a four-months' cruise five weeks ago. I knew because friends of mine were on her. But what made me definitely suspicious about him was a sort of Inspector Hornleigh slip, such as we were recently discussing.

"When I told him Rolls had been struck over the head, he said it was only a day or two before that his stepfather had asked him to clean those fireirons. How did he know a fireiron had been used and not a bludgeon, a niblick or a hammer ?"

"Hornleigh would have hanged him on that !" said Korwood.

"But a jury would not. As I said, it made me suspicious ; but he had his alibi. When Mrs. Rolls

told us he had not really been with her the alibi went."

"So you had him," murmured Bardwell.

"Hardly that, but it was getting clearer. When I go to a cinema I always stuff the half of the ticket that is given back into my pocket. Other people probably do the same. I knew the coat Jim Weston had worn when he came in and had seen it hanging behind the door. I felt in his pocket and found the spare halves of three tickets. I saw the cinema manager and the numbers proved that two were issued when Weston entered with his mother at about half-past two, and the third at about half-past five—when he returned to take her home. The crime was committed here just after five and the run in the car would take about fifteen minutes."

"Smart work," said Charlot. "You had him then."

"Not quite. A man might slip out of a cinema for a score of reasons—on business, to meet a girl, or because he remembered some urgent call. I had seen Mrs. Egan, the daily help, and she told me of Weston's quarrel with Rolls. It made a strong *prima facie* case and I handed it over to Inspector Goff. He did the rest."

"What else was there?" asked Provost.

Roger did not directly answer his question.

"I said just now there was perhaps a connection between the two crimes. It was this: Weston knew a man had been killed at about five o'clock and the killer apparently got away with it. If he could kill Rolls at the same hour, and more or less in the same place, it would be supposed both crimes were done by the same person. He could not be suspected of killing Denton, for he was undoubtedly away at that time. So no one would imagine he could be guilty

of the second crime—even without his cinema alibi.”

“His motive,” said Oxley, “was to leave Rolls saddled with the till robberies?”

“Mainly that. Probably he also hoped to succeed to the job. There would be sympathy for Mrs. Rolls when her husband was killed; the matter of the accounts might be dropped, and Weston would be here, carrying on. No doubt it looked a good chance.”

“What did Inspector Goff do?” asked Provost.

“He did, with his assistants, what I could not do. He found someone who had seen Weston’s car in a back turning near here a little before five. Weston must have skulked about, waiting for his chance. Goff also discovered how the money had gone—racing and a woman. He found too, that the *Atalanta Star* people had a bad mark against him for suspected theft.”

“Evidently a wrong ‘un,” said Korwood. “I suppose they arrested him? I noticed he was nowhere about.”

“Last night. When he found out how much they knew, especially about the cinema tickets and the car, he crumpled up.”

“I am glad he will get what he deserves,” commented Ferrowe. “Rolls was such a splendid fellow. But I still don’t understand about Gwyer and Denton.

“That goes for me too,” said Charlot. “I have never heard of fingerprints on handkerchiefs; I must try the experiment. But assuming it is as you say, what is the motive? Gwyer was one of the best and kindest men I have ever met.”

“At first,” replied Roger, “the motive puzzled me, but, as I told Goff, if you look after the facts the motives can take care of themselves.”

“What were the facts?” asked Provost.

"The first fact that struck me was that Rolls knew more than he had told. Now whom would Rolls be likely to shield? Hardly young Norman Cross, who was a stranger to him. Nor Provost or Oxley or Korwood, for the same reason. Nor Bardwell, in spite of his bribe——"

"I was crazy," muttered that man. "I wanted to keep Vickie out of it."

"Exactly. Silence was a serious matter. It might involve complicity in the crime. There was only one man for whom Rolls would face that. Not you, or Ferrowe or Miller, or any of the others; but the man for whom he had a devotion dating back to the war, the man who befriended him in his hour of need, the man who got him the job here."

"That is hardly evidence that Gwyer killed Denton," said Charlot.

"It is not. I am only explaining what made me look for evidence. When Inspector Beard made his first inquiry, Gwyer told us he had been in the clubhouse that afternoon. 'But it was much earlier,' Rolls said quickly. Gwyer naturally left it at that. Later, when Goff asked Rolls to repeat his story, he remembered other men who came in earlier, but omitted Gwyer's name altogether."

"Didn't you remind him?" asked Korwood.

"It was not until I was puzzling things out that I realised its possible significance. I was considering the fact that the hammering by the carpenters prevented the shot being heard. In ordinary circumstances a shot would have given an immediate alarm. The person who decided to use firearms must have known of the work that was being done and that the hammering might go on after five o'clock in the afternoon. That seemed to cut out visitors and probably most of the members."

"Gwyer was captain of the club," said Oxley. "He knew."

"With Gwyer," proceeded Roger, "the use of such a weapon presented no difficulty, but there were other points too. When I saw Denton talking to Miss Venne, I met Gwyer just outside the lounge. Miss Venne told us afterwards the nature of the conversation. Had Gwyer heard any of it? After his quarrel with his uncle, young Cross rushed out and collided with Ernest Gwyer, dropping at his feet the letter that told of Denton's treachery. Ernest handed the letter to his brother. Later Gwyer was asking when Webber would be back—Webber in whose locker the revolver was concealed."

"Those are curious points," said Provost, "but they hardly constitute a motive for Gwyer to shoot Denton."

"I agree," said Roger, "but bit by bit we had learned the sort of man Denton was. The affair with the girl in your club. The affair with the clergyman's daughter. The story of the doings at Heart's-Ease revealed by the Poppetts. The robbery of the nephew's sweetheart. It was always my theory that Denton's fate was a just retribution for something he had done in the indulgences of his lust."

"But——" began Charlot.

"Rolls told me he had served with Gwyer in the Dorset Rifles in Mesopotamia. Miss Winnie Gainer said there were rumours of a broken romance that had kept Gwyer from marrying. A friend of mine and of my father's, Colonel Derwent, was also with the Dorset Rifles out there. I wrote and asked him if he knew anything of Major Gwyer. He replied he knew him well. He was one of the best and bravest officers he had ever met and much beloved by his men, but"—Roger paused a moment—"there

had been a tragedy in his life. Before he got transferred to Mesopotamia he was in France and left on special leave to be married. On the day of the wedding the girl sent him a message that she had gone off instead with a man she loved more dearly. That man was Hugh Denton."

There was silence when Roger came to that point in his story. At last it all became clear. No one doubted the absolute truth of what they heard, though there was still something they did not understand.

"After twenty years—or more," murmured Charlot.

"Yes," said Roger, "it dates back to 1918. I am not going to read you all that is in the letter he left for me, but part of it you ought to hear."

Again there was silence as he unfolded the sheets the brother had handed to him.

"One thing I would ask you to believe. When I shot Hugh Denton it was not an act of revenge. It has sometimes been my duty to take life, but I have tried never to do it unless I felt I was thereby saving life. It was so in this case.

"It would be futile to try to recall my emotions when I found that the girl I was to have married had run away with another man. I had been given a wonderful send off in France and many gifts had been showered on me, both by my brother officers and also by the men of my company. Whether the loss of the girl I loved or the ignominy of my position rankled the more deeply it is impossible now to say. I can only declare with absolute sincerity that with the passing of time, and thanks to the comradeship of true friends, I have outlived them both. I was nearly twenty years older than my Stella, and she had preferred a man of her own age. That perhaps was natural, though the manner of her

going might have been less cruel. Had she been happy, I believe I could have been content. But Hugh Denton was faithless to her as to others. He left her and a year later she died.

"I never sought him out for vengeance. It may seem strange, but I only saw him twice before I shot him. Once with Stella, shortly before we were to be married. Then here again, when I heard him talking to Miss Venne. I kept out of his way.

"The end of the war saved him from active service, but I had tidings of him from time to time and it was always of the mischief he was doing.

"As I told you, Norman Cross dropped at my brother's feet a letter that showed he was again seeking to rob someone else—even his own ward and nephew—of the joys of love. Surely the cup was full. Must such mischief continue? Should not broken hearts and ruined homes weigh on the scales of human justice?

"I determined to act at once. I telephoned him in Miss Venne's name and arranged to meet him in the club-house."

Roger looked up. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "That is just what I told Vickie Venne might have happened." But he refrained.

"I waited my opportunity and I shot him. I held the weapon in a handkerchief and wiped it carefully. I did not wish to keep it on me as I had other appointments that afternoon. I put it into Webber's locker, knowing he was away, and I removed the key.

"Unfortunately I lost the key. I must have dropped it; I do not know how or when. It did not worry me. Webber was away—as I thought—for six months and I should be able to recover my revolver long before he was back, when the police had gone. Even if it should be found I did not suppose it could be traced to me."

"He never dreamed of fingerprints on the handkerchief!" ejaculated Korwood.

"Now it has been found and I am writing this in the knowledge of my uncertain tenure of life. I do not wish any one else at any time to bear the blame for what I did. I do not regret it, for I feel that more and greater evils may have been averted. To that end I would freely give my life should it be necessary."

Roger stopped. There was a little more, but it was for himself alone.

"When you knew of the fingerprints on the handkerchief," said Oxley, "you planned the luncheon party to catch him."

"Put it that way if you like," replied Roger. "I would rather say I did it to warn him. I have told you my reasons for believing those fingerprints were Gwyer's, but at that moment only Gwyer himself knew if I was right. If I was wrong, he could treat the matter as you others did—with doubt or indifference. If I was right, he knew where he stood. Identification could only have been a matter of time. The luncheon saved time, but it also enabled me to tell what was coming. Was that not better than keeping silence until in an unsuspecting moment an arrest was made?"

"Gwyer understood," said Charlot, "and he was grateful. His second toast to you was to tell you so. I see it now."

"Denton was a devil," declared Bardwell. "It would have saved much misery if someone had done years ago what Gwyer did last week."

"You are right," said Korwood. "Yet the law is the law and private executions would lead to a lot of bother."

"The case was exceptional," began Ferrowe.

"Good-bye, you chaps," interrupted Bardwell, going to the door.

"Are you leaving?" asked Provost.

"Only to find Vickie."

"My five pounds, when I get it," smiled Roger, "will buy a nice wedding present. Ask her from me what she would like."

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